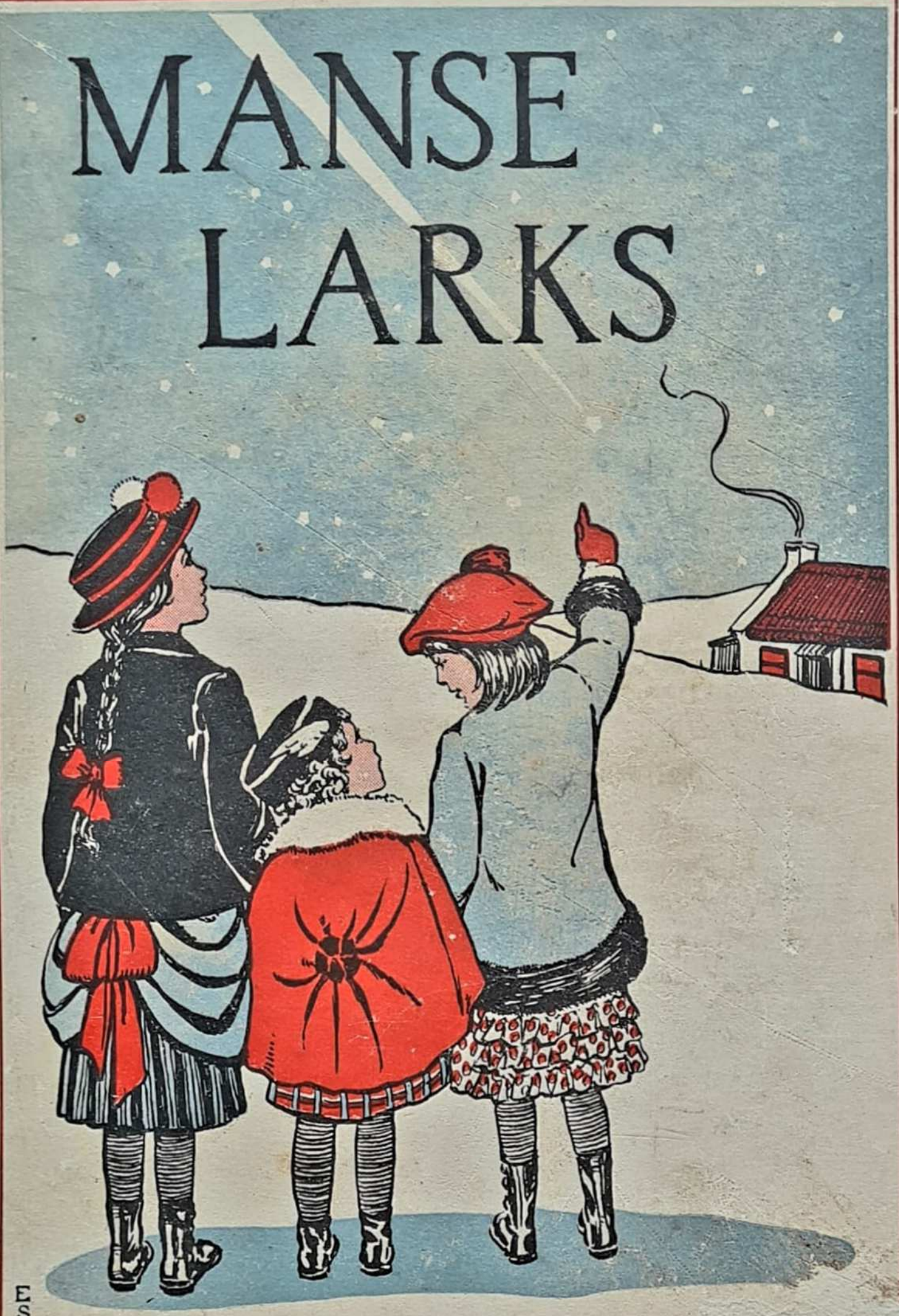
MANSE LARKS



E S D.

MANSE LARKS

By

LYDIA MARY FOSTER

Author of "The Bush that Burned," "Tyrone Among the Bushes."

THE QUOTA PRESS

BELFAST

1936

First Published - - - November, 1936.

Printed in Belfast by The Belfast
Steam-Printing Co., Royal Avenue.

Old Irish Folk Song.

You'll wander far and wide, dear, but you'll come back again,,
You'll come back to your father and your mother in the glen,
Although we may be lyin' 'neath the heather grasses then,
You'll be comin' back, my darlin'. Ah!

You'll hear the wild birds singing beneath a brighter sky,
The roof-tree of your house, dear, it will be broad and high,
But you'll hunger for the hearthstone where a child you used to lie,
You'll be comin' back, my darlin'. Ah!

MANSE LARKS.

CHAPTER I.

BETH'S FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL.

I look back fifty years—because I am old it is like yesterday—and I see us all sitting at breakfast in the little parlour of the old Manse, that parlour so warm in Winter, for no matter where you sat you were never far from the fire. There were seven of us altogether, Papa, Mamma, Janet, Noble, Hugh, Beth and I, who am Ida. Towzer lay stretched on the hearthrug, and cunning Dandydozer, taking advantage of Papa's absence from the armchair, lay curled up pretending to sleep.

"Eat up your porridge, Beth," said Mamma.

"I can't get it down."

"Have some bread and butter then."

"Couldn't."

"Drink up your tea."

Beth tried, but nearly choked. She could neither eat nor drink because she was excited. That morning she was going to school for the first time.

"Hurry up, Beth," said Janet, who was fourteen and the oldest of us all. "There's a secret and you won't know it till you're ready for school."

Beth's big grey eyes were like saucers with pleasure and surprise. "Oh! I do love secrets," she said, clapping her hands.

"Well, hurry up if you want to see it soon," said Janet again, "or we'll be late."

Mamma stood holding her red cloak and little round-

about hat that was like a box turned upside down. She put them on and kissed Beth as she always did after putting on her cloak and hat. "Dear little Red-Riding-Hood," she said, "I'll be lonely without you to-day."

"You'll have Papa and Sally. Where's Sally? I want to say good-bye to her." Sally was never very far off. She had come to the Manse the same day as Mamma—that was long before any of us. "And Noble and Hugh; are they away to school?"

"Yes, long ago."

"Well, I must say good-bye to Towzer and Dandydozer."

"Towzer will leave you part of the way as he always does Janet and Ida. See, here he comes back from leaving the boys part of their way first."

Dandydozer watched all the fuss from the armchair through half-closed eyes, too lazy to open them wide. Beth put both arms round the big black beauty.

"I'm going to school, Dandydozer," she whispered in his ear; "be good till I come back, won't you now?"

Dandydozer opened his eyes wide, and then shut them, as if he was winking at this good advice.

"You'll not eat the little birds while I'm away?" Dandydozer winked again.

"Hurry up," said Janet for the third time.

"I'm ready now. Where's the secret?"

"Here, behind your back," said Mamma. Beth turned round quickly, and Mamma placed a little red basket with a lid over her arm. "This is your very own to hold the books that Miss Lark will give you, and, look, I have your lunch in it already."

"Oh! what a lovely secret, and here's a kiss for it.

I'll love that dear wee basket and keep it always," and she kissed the basket too. "I'm sure Papa had a share in it," she said. Beth climbed on his knee and gave him a good many resounding smacks. Sally always said Papa's heart was set on Beth.

"Come on," shouted Janet, who was at the gate by this time.

I took one hand and Janet the other and Towzer ran before, behind and everywhere, and so Beth set out for her wonderful first day at school.

We ran until Beth got out of breath, and then we stopped a minute. Sometimes we went to school by "near cuts." Walking on the road soberly was no fun. But alongside a meadow and across a little river over which was a plank, and up a grassy hill and down on the other side holding hands and racing so fast that when we got to the bottom we could not stop, that was a funnier way.

Miss Lark lived in the long low white cottage in which she had her school. It was smothered in old fashioned red and white country roses that on hot summer days took pity on us, poor shut-ups bothering our brains over lessons and sums, and sent us in their sympathy by the open window—delicious perfume such as I never smell now—refreshing little heads that were hot and drowsy, and helping little moist hands to guide a pencil or pen.

Beth was not the only new pupil that day. There was another even younger. She was called Baby Carroll, and her nurse wheeled her to school, for she was only four, while Beth was five. These two newcomers brought the number of Miss Lark's pupils up to ten. We usually met some of the others at the cross roads, but this morning we were later

than usual owing to Beth, and they were all in the school-room when we arrived. The girls were delighted to see Beth and Baby Carroll. The two little boy pupils, Tommy Crowe and Johnnie Dick, hung back and pretended they cared nothing for girls, but they kept looking at them on the sly all the same. We got into our seats on either side of the long table that ran down the centre of the room. Beth and Baby wanted to sit together, for they knew each other well and were great friends.

We were scarcely seated when Miss Lark came in. It was one of the rules that we must all be in our places when she entered. She taught us above all things to be polite. We were expected to rise and bow and say "Good morning, Miss Lark," and Miss Lark bowed and replied, "Good morning, young ladies and gentlemen." Beth thought this a very nice thing to do, and she tried to imitate the bows around her.

Miss Lark welcomed her two new pupils and hoped they would get on well.

School always opened with a hymn. To-day it was "Jesus, Friend of Little Children," a favourite of Beth's, and she sang it so lustily that the older girls smiled and even Miss Lark smiled a little. Next came the Bible Lesson and then we all repeated the Lord's Prayer together.

The chapter Miss Lark read that morning was one of the Psalms composed by King David, in which he tells us to look up at the sky and see the wonderful heavenly bodies there that God has created. Miss Lark said the stars, that looked to us like twinkling specks of light because they were so far away from us, were in reality worlds most of them far, far larger than the one on which we lived. She

said they were innumerable. Beth thought that the biggest word she had ever heard, but Miss Lark explained that it just meant heaps upon heaps upon heaps. She turned to Beth and asked her could she count the stars?

"Yes," said Beth, anxious to please Miss Lark.

Miss Lark smiled, and when she smiled all the rest of us smiled too. "Count them for me to-night, Beth," she said, "and tell me to-morrow how many there are."

Beth looked very solemn and said "Yes, Miss Lark."

After the Scripture lessons Beth and Baby Carroll were called up to say the alphabet. Baby Carroll did not even know "O," and Beth thought that shocking, for she knew every letter and could even spell a few words of two letters. Miss Lark gave Beth a slate of figures to copy, and asked Baby Carroll if she could make any figures; "No," said Baby, "but I can make men."

Silence was the rule of the school, but Beth noticed with disapproval that the older girls whispered to each other while they were doing their sums or copies seated in the desk that ran along the wall, with their backs to Miss Lark.

At lunch time we had always good fun. We were allowed to play outside amongst the trees. The bigger girls of us played "Post Office." We stood with our backs to a tree that was called by the name of some town, and one of us was "out" in the middle. The one who was "out" would shout: "There is a letter going from Belfast to Dublin," and the girls who were at these two trees would have to change places, while the one who was "out" would run very hard to try to get one of their places while they

were changing; whoever did not reach the tree she was making for in time was then "out."

The little ones played "tig," and they had counting out rhymes. One of them, I remember, was:—

"Ena, mena, mina, mo,
Catch a nigger by the toe,
If he squeals then let him go,
Ena, mena, mina, mo."

Beth took great care of Baby Carroll at playtime. She felt so much older and thought she knew so much more, that she treated Baby like a real baby and as if she were her little mother.

Beth hurried us home from school that day for she wanted to tell Papa and Mamma and Sally all about it, and was just bursting with news when she dashed into the house. Towzer was so glad to see her back safe that he nearly knocked her down with his rough and ready welcome. Noble and Hugh came in not long afterwards with a great clatter from their school. Noble was twelve, and next to Janet, and Hugh was eight, and I was between them, and on my next birthday which was very near would be eleven. Papa and Mamma had dinner over but Sally always kept ours hot for us.

"How many slaps did you get to-day, Beth?" asked Noble as we were finishing dinner.

"None," said Beth proudly.

"Well, you'll get all the more to-morrow if you don't know your lessons off. Doesn't Miss Lark keep a cane? She used to when I was there."

"That was because you needed it," said Janet. "She has no bad pupils since you left and doesn't require it."

Noble and Janet were always "at" each other. He thought because Janet was the oldest she gave herself too many airs and talked down to the rest of us. When Janet made this rude remark he could not think of anything to say, so he just tilted up the bottom of the glass of water that she was holding up to her mouth and the water spurted out over her face and dress. He would not have done this if Papa or Mamma had been there, and when he did it he got up and ran away. Hugh followed him, for he did everything Noble did. Sally came in with a cloth to dry Janet's dress. "Wait till I catch him," she said, "I'll larn him manners. I'll cool his heels with a whole bucket of water, the young rapscullion."

CHAPTER II.

COUNTING THE STARS.

After tea Beth brought out the little red basket and took her books out of it, and sat with us around the table to learn her lessons. Her books consisted of a first book and a table book which she had shown to everybody in the house. We all sat with our elbows on the table studying or pretending to study very hard, but we spent a lot of time drawing things on our exercise books and then tearing out the leaf, a thing which was forbidden.

Noble drew a picture and slipped it on the top of Janet's pile of books under her very nose. It was a lady with a pig-tail down to her heels. She had a pug nose turned up in the air and immense feet. Underneath was written: "This is Miss Janet who thinks she is the greatest person in the world."

Janet drew a picture of a boy holding out his hand and the schoolmaster beside him with a long pointer held high in his hand ready to bring it down, and she wrote underneath: "This is Master Noble getting what he deserves, but he doesn't get it often enough."

Papa called the pair of them to come for their Latin lesson. They did not know it very well, and I heard Papa tell them their heads were like strainers for nothing would stick in them.

When they came back to the table Dandydozer was walking about on it and brushing everybody's face with his fine tail of which he was so vain. Beth put her arm

round him and gave him a tight squeeze. Noble teased Beth greatly about Dandydozer. He always said Dandydozer was *his* cat, and this annoyed Beth terribly, for Dandydozer was really her's, and she got him from Lucy Crowe when quite a tiny kitten.

"We'll settle it this way once and for all," said Noble (under his breath so that Papa would not hear and tell him to stop talking and learn his lessons), "Whoever Dandydozer goes to she belongs to," and Noble slipped out to the pantry and brought a little bit of beef hidden in his closed hand, and held out his hand pretending to stroke Dandydozer and then drew it away again. Dandydozer smelt the beef and struggled out of Beth's arms and went across the table to Noble.

"There you are, Miss Beth, he said, "Dandydozer's mine for he left you and came to me."

Beth was getting sleepy and her voice was tearful. "Dandydozer's mine. Isn't he Janet? Isn't he Ida?"

We all said "Yes, of course Dandydozer's yours, Beth."

And before Noble knew what Janet was going to do, she had snatched the bit of beef out of Noble's hand and put it into Beth's, and Dandydozer left Noble and went straight back to her.

The tears vanished and Beth held him close and leant her cheek against his soft body. "Dandydozer, aren't you really and truly mine?" she whispered. And after he had finished his beef Dandydozer purred something that Beth took to be "Yes."

We had "worship" then that Beth might go to bed. I always gave round the books. We sang a psalm and read a chapter verse about—all except Beth who could not do

that yet. Hugh was not very good at it either, and made funny mistakes that the rest of us tittered at. Once in reading of the man who had the palsy, Hugh said he had the "plaster," and in that verse that reads "their hearts are as fat as grease," Hugh said, "their hearts are as fat as 'geese'."

After the reading we all knelt down and Papa committed us to God's care for the night. Mamma took Beth by the hand and led her upstairs. She left her for a minute and on coming back she found Beth stretching far out of the open window. Mamma ran over and caught her. "You might fall out, Beth, you're stretching too far; what are you doing?" she asked.

"I am counting the stars."

"Counting the stars? What are you counting the stars for?"

"Because Miss Lark asked me if I could count the stars and I said I could, and she told me to count them to-night and tell her how many there are to-morrow."

"That is a thing you could not do, Beth. Not the wisest man in the world could do it. Nobody but God who made them can count them."

"But I told Miss Lark I would do it, and she'll be angry if I don't."

If she asks you just tell her you tried and couldn't and she'll say nothing more." At last Beth was persuaded to leave the window and undress and climb into her cot that stood beside her Mother's bed.

"Tell me a story, please, Mamma. Tell me about the three wishes."

"There was once an old man and his wife," began

Mamma, "who were always grumbling and wishing for something they hadn't got. One night they were sitting one at each side of the fire grumbling as usual, and the old woman said: 'I wish a fairy would come down the chimney and give us three wishes.' She had hardly spoken till down the chimney popped a fairy, and said: 'You can have the three wishes you want.'

"'I wish I had a blackpudding,' the old woman said; and immediately a black pudding came down the chimney.

"The old man was so annoyed at her wishing for so silly a thing when she might have wished for something valuable said angrily: 'I wish it would stick on your nose.' And the black pudding stuck on her nose.

"'Oh dear!' said the old woman, 'I wish this thing would get off my nose.' The pudding got off her nose and went up the chimney again.

"'Now,' said the fairy, 'you have had three wishes.' And away she went up the chimney too."

"And they got nothing," said Beth.

"Nothing, they were so foolish, and did not think before speaking. So they lost their three wishes."

Beth was soon fast asleep and dreaming that she flew right up to the stars, and even there she could not count them there were so many, for she could only count up to fifty. "Maybe when I'm bigger and can count hundreds," she thought, "I'll be able to do it." But Beth lived to be able to count hundreds, and thousands, and millions, yet she was never able to count the stars.

But she liked to look up at them, especially on a frosty night when they were glittering like diamonds. One night as she and Janet and I were coming home from tea at

Lucy Crowe's Beth suddenly shouted, "Look, look, there's a star falling down; will it hurt itself?"

"That's a shooting star," said Janet, and you may have a wish when you see one.

"May I?" said Beth, "then I wish for a new doll."

"I wish for a lovely book called 'Little Women' for my very own," said Janet.

"What do you wish for, Ida?" said Beth to me.

"I wish for a pair of skates, for I want to learn to skate."

And strange to say we all got our wishes in time.

Beth was rather afraid of going to school next morning. She was very quiet all the way, and in school she was waiting every minute till Miss Lark would ask for the number of the stars. Like many a thing we dread it never happened, and Beth felt a great deal happier coming home from school than going, and danced and skipped all the way.

CHAPTER III.

BETH'S FIRST DAY AT SUNDAY SCHOOL.

That was on a Friday night we saw the shooting star and all wished a wish. It was a very frosty night and on Saturday it began to snow in the afternoon. Beth sat at the parlour window watching the white flakes that fell so gently, yet soon made the bushes in the Manse garden look like immense snowballs and covered the ground with a white carpet.

"They are plucking the geese in Scotland for the New Year," Janet told her.

"What a lot they must pluck," said Beth, "I wish they would stop plucking them for I'm going to Sunday School to-morrow." Beth did not get *that* wish. When she was going to bed, on pulling back the blind and looking out, she saw it was still snowing away as steadily as ever.

The first thing when she woke in the morning she ran over to the window and pulled back the blind again. The snow had ceased but everything was covered up by it, hedges, bushes, flower-beds, paths, nothing could be seen but the snow. It had turned the whole place into a beautiful white world.

"You had better not start Sunday School to-day, Beth, said Mamma at breakfast.

"Oh, Mamma, do let me go. I love the snow," she pleaded, and Mamma put on her goloshes, and her warm red cloak, and her little white tippet round her neck and the muff that matched it, and put on the little round box hat

over the dark curls and kissed her, and said she would get no harm. Then she saw that the boys had on their leggings, and that Janet and I had on our goloshes, and we were all ready to start.

"Now," said Papa, "I'll go first, and you must all follow on like a flock of ducks, one after the other putting your feet in my footprints, for the snow is very deep."

That was how we walked the whole way to Sunday School; at least that was the way Papa meant us to do, but often we did not set our feet in his large footprints, for there was a good deal of jostling and pushing one another. The boys would give the girls a shove, making us plunge with one foot into the deep snow. We would return the shove when the boys were not thinking and laugh at them floundering about in the deep snow. And, indeed, they did not mind *that* very much, for if they had had their own way they would have plunged through it all the way and snowballed us if they dared, but that would not be allowed on Sunday. Beth's little legs in their long-legged buttoned boots and goloshes were sore and tired when we got to the Meeting-house. At the door other children were stamping the snow from their boots and rubbing their feet on the mat inside, which was wet with melted snow, as also was the hall.

Some one wanted to speak to Papa in the session-room, and he went into it thinking that Janet and I would look after Beth, but we had already gone to our classes and Beth was left standing in the hall.

Never in her life before had she felt so lonely. Other boys and girls stamped the snow from their feet and passed inside, giving her a shy glance. She felt she was utterly

deserted by everyone who loved her, and as if she were on a desert island like Robinson Crusoe that Noble had told her about, only that he never saw anybody and she only saw strange faces. Oh! how her heart was breaking for Mamma! Would she ever see her again? The tears rose to her eyes and streamed down her face, for Beth's tears were never far away. The boys called them "the water-works," and Noble said he was afraid that some day she would flood the house and they would all be drowned.

Just when Beth thought she would die of loneliness standing there, and her sobs were choking her she felt an arm round her and a kind voice say:—

"What ails you, my dear wee lamb?"

Beth looked up and saw through her tears a sweet old face that was all over wrinkles, and an old-fashioned poke bonnet surrounding it. What a comfort it was in that lonesome strange place to have old Mary Bell, the sextoness, put a warm arm round you and hold you tight to her side.

"You're all right, dear. Don't cry any more," said Mary Bell.

"They all went away and left me," sobbed Beth.

"That was a shame for them," said Mary, "but I'll find somebody for you." Mary took her arm from round her, and lifting her wide skirt her hand dived into a big pocket in her petticoat, where Beth's eyes followed it, and out it came again with a great big round peppermint between her finger and thumb.

"Open your mouth," said Mary. Beth had to open it very wide indeed for she had never seen such a big peppermint before, and once it was in her mouth she

couldn't speak any more, but the peppermint dried up her tears anyway and made her happy again.

Mary took her by the hand and brought her to Papa, who was just leaving the session-room to open the Sunday School. Beth could not say anything her mouth was so full, but Papa saw the tear-stained face and wondered what was wrong.

"They all went away and left her alone in the hall, sir," explained Mary, "and she thought she was lost."

"That was too bad of them," said Papa, "Why didn't Ida take you into her class? Come, and I'll put you with little ones like yourself."

Taking her hand he led her to a class of small children. "Here, Miss Brown," he said, "is a new pupil for you."

Miss Brown shook hands with Beth and said she was glad to see her, and put her to sit beside a little girl she knew. Beth also knew Miss Brown well for she was often at the Manse, and she forgot she had ever been lonely while listening to the lovely story Miss Brown was telling them.

It was about Moses, the little boy that the cruel king Pharoah would have killed if he had been kept in his own home, and how his Mother made a basket to hold him and covered it with something that would not let the water through, and put him in it and hid it down by the water's edge of a great river among the high bulrushes that grew there. The part of the story Beth liked best was about the baby's little sister, Miriam, being left to watch over him, and when the Princess who came down to bathe in the river and saw what was a great surprise to her—a little baby lying in a basket—and wanted to take him home with her, Miriam ran up and asked her would she like her to get

a nurse for it, and the Princess said she would, and Miriam ran off and brought the baby's own mother! Beth told me afterwards that while she was listening to this favourite story of hers she thought how very different *her* sisters were from good Miriam, for they went away and left her in a strange place and didn't seem to care what happened to her.

Miss Brown went on to tell them that this baby in the basket grew up to be one of the best and greatest men that ever lived, so that God called him up into a mountain and talked with him and gave him the tables of stone on which were written the ten Commandments that tell us what is right to do and what is wrong to do.

"Is Moses dead now, Miss Brown?" asked the little girl who sat beside her.

Miss Brown smiled, and so did Beth, for *she* knew Moses was dead a long time, maybe long before Papa was born, and Papa was old. Once Beth had asked him how old he was, and he said she couldn't count up to it if he told her.

When the Sabbath School was over the children crowded round the stove in the middle of the Meeting-house with its long chimney pipe that went up right to the roof, and warmed themselves. Mary Bell had a fine fire on, and she poked it up and it roared up the flue. The boys tried to put their hands on the stove, but they had to snatch them away quickly, for it would have burned them.

Mamma came for service, and called Beth out to the hall to eat a "piece" that she had brought, for she thought it was too long for her to fast till after the service.

They took their seats in the Manse pew, which was in the front of the gallery. It had a door that shut you in

snugly. Mamma sat between Noble and Hugh, but Beth was next to her. When Mamma was listening to the sermon Noble tore paper into tiny little bits and let them float down on the heads of the people below. At sermon time the little head went down on Mamma's shoulder, and Beth was soon fast asleep. Mamma had to shake her gently to wake her in time to put her penny in the long-handled collecting box that the elder pushed up the pew. After service this same elder reproved Noble for his conduct in Meeting. Noble said to us he would spit down on *his* head next Sunday.

The walk home was pleasant. The snow was now more trodden and easier to walk on. The boys gave each other and sometimes Janet and Ida a snowball when Mamma wasn't looking, and hoped the snow would last all the week, which it did.

CHAPTER IV.

PADDY AND BIDDY.

While everybody was a friend of the Manse children there were two special friends who lived in the lane behind, or, as it is called in Ulster "the loanin."

These were Paddy and Biddy O'Flagherty, but I doubt if Beth could have told you their surname, for they were just "Paddy" and "Biddy" to her and everybody else. A happy pair they were! Not young in years, but with hearts that would never grow old.

It was lovely to sit in their wee house, at the peat fire on the hearth. A dim little place it was even at noonday, for there was only one small window of four panes, and one of these had been broken as long as the children could remember, and stuffed with rags to keep out the cold wind.

Paddy and Biddy seldom seemed to have anything to do, and were certainly never in a hurry. Biddy usually sat on a "creepie," looking into the red turf fire, while Paddy, as long as daylight lasted leant over the "half-door" admiring his hens and ducks, or holding a conversation with anyone who chanced to pass that way. Harmless leisurely conversation was Paddy's favourite recreation.

You were always sure of a welcome at Paddy and Biddy's, and also sure of an interest taken in everything you had to tell them. If the news you brought them was pleasant they were pleased, and if you were sorry about anything they were sorry too. But no matter what you had

to tell them they were always ready to listen to you. Janet was getting too big to visit much in Paddy and Biddy's, but Beth and I sat entranced while one or other of them told us marvellous tales, although we had heard these many times before. Some of the particulars might, and indeed were different at different tellings, but you believed all to be true when you were listening to them.

Paddy and Biddy could tell the grandest stories about the fairies. They always called them "the wee people," or "the good people," for you had to speak of them respectfully or you might suffer, and fairies could hear you no matter where you were.

"Where are the fairies now, Paddy?" asked Beth as we sat on stools at the fire.

"Where they always were, dartin' here an' there, in an' out among the bushes, and skippin' about in the green grass, peepin' out at you all the time, but takin' good care not to let you see them. It's only an odd mortal they have any commerce with now. There's them that they like an' many's a kindness they do them that mebbe they know nothin' about, or that it's the wee people all the time that's workin' for them; an' there's others they have mebbe a grudge against, an' there's no knowin' the power of harm they can do them."

"What harm do they do them?" said Beth. "Do they kill them?"

"No, I never heard of the good people exactly killin' anyone, but they can put a spell on their cows that makes them give no milk, and them that has offended them in some way might churn an' churn forever an' a day an' no butter would come. Never, never, yous say a word against the wee

people, even if it was only under you breath, or no matter where yous might be, for take my word for it you'll be sorry for it some day if yous do. Now mind and take my advice."

"Did you ever see a fairy, Paddy?" I wonder how many times we had asked Paddy this question.

"I used to see more than I do now," confessed Paddy. "They're gettin' scarcer now, and the rayson is that they can get nayther peace nor quiet with the noise that's goin' on at the present time in the world. But of a calm evenin' I can still hear the tap, tap, tap of the leprachaun, him that's the fairies' shoemaker, tap, tap, tap, hard at work on their wee shoes."

Said Biddy: "There's just as many of them as there always was, but the people nowadays haven't the good eyesight that they had in times past, an' can't see them. Me own gran'mother, that lived to be a hundred an' had the second sight, used to see them reg'lar. There was a big thorn tree in the middle of the field where she lived that belonged to the fairies, and they would dance roun' an' roun' it on moonlight nights an' mebbe on dark nights too, but she couldn't see them then. They would all be dressed in green —an' that's one rayson people can't see them—an' they'd have a wee fairy fiddler playin' the music for them. Once she catched sight of one that had a red hat with a white feather in it, an' oh! the darlin' wee man he was! not the height of a tayspoon, but very proud, and holdin' hisself as straight as the poker. Always afther that she kep' lookin' in the hedges an' among the ragweeds in the fields, an' roun' about the fairy thorn, but she could never get sight of him again. But once she foun' a wee white feather not the

size of one of the wee puffs you would blow off a dandelion, an' she was afeared to lift it for fear it was his an' that he would be angry an' bring harm on her, but she knowed it was a fairy feather right enough. Me gran'father wouldn't let a twig be touched on that thorn tree, but ploughed roun' it careful every year, for he was a wise man an' a well eddicated man. But after he died another man bought the place. He was an unbeliever in fairies, an' the first thing he did was to cut down their gran' fairy thorn, for he said it was in his road, an' as sure as I'm sittin' on this "creepie" didn't it fall on him an' leave him a cripple for life!"

Paddy did not like to be kept out of the conversation for very long, so now he took up the subject.

"I could tell you far stranger things nor that about me own gran'father. He was goin' to get married an' he started to build a nice wee mud house facin' the roadside, that it would be heartsome an' pleasant to live in, seein' the people go by an' havin' a shannaugh with them. It was half-ways up an' looked tarrible well, an' he left it one evenin' and kep' lookin' back to admire it after workin' at it all day, but when he came back in the mornin' not a bit of him could see hilt or hare of his wee house, for when he come up to the spot hadn't it fell flat on the groun'. He said to himself, that must have been last night's wind, but I didn't think there was such a storm as that, I must have slep' soun', and he started at the foundations an' built it up again. When he had got it as high as it had been afore, he comes next mornin' to work at it, an' he thought his eyes must be deceivin' him surely, for there it lay on the groun' like a pancake again. He said to himself: 'it can't be the wind this time, for last night there wasn't a sough, no not so

much as would stir a leaf on a tree.' He puzzled his mind thinkin' what he could do next, an' he sat down among the ruins to plan an' he felt all downhearted. It was a warm mornin' an' he felt a bit drowsy, an' the first thing he knowed he gave a jump, for what did he se afore his eyes but a wee green craythur that he knowed at once was a fairy. Me gran'father touched his hat to the wee body knowing that it was the right thing to be mannerly or it might be the worse for you."

"Says the wee man in a queer squeakin' voice, but speakin' the language that you an' me speaks right enough:

"Turn your house the other way,
For this is the side on which we play,
An' if you don't it'll all go astray."

An' away went the wee body like a shot. One minit he was there an' the next minit he wasn't there, an' what way he went me gran'father couldn't see. After restin' hisself another wee while an' studyin' the matther over he bethought him that it would be betther to take the wee fella's advice. So for the third time he started his wee house an' turned it this time with its back facin' the road an' its front lookin' on the mountains. It was a poor lonely view to look at instead of the heartsome road, but never again was it interfered with, an' it was a gran' warm wee house, an' me gran'father got married an' lived in it all his life an' died in it when his time come, an' every concarn in it went well."

CHAPTER V.

AUNT BETHIAH'S THREEPENNY-BIT.

Now, children," said Mamma one morning at breakfast, "Papa and I are going away to Uncle Hugh's for a week, and I have just had a letter from Aunt Bethiah kindly saying she will come and take charge of you all."

Such a face as everybody made!

"We could take care of ourselves quite well," said Janet. "I am nearly fifteen and could keep house. Didn't I do it when you were in bed for three days ill, and made you lovely tea and toast? We all carried up your trays and never spilled anything."

"Indeed, you all did splendidly, but as Papa and I shall both be away it would be better to have a wise head to help Sally to keep you in order. For you know you impose on Sally and can coax her to let you do anything."

"Aren't I a wise head?" said Janet.

"Well, sometimes you know yourself, you quarrel with the boys, and Noble and Hugh mightn't do what you tell them."

"I'll not do what Aunt Bethiah tells me," said Noble defiantly.

"Neither will I," said Hugh.

"Oh yes, Noble and Hugh, you will, Aunt Bethiah will be in the place of Papa and me and everybody must obey her."

"She's a horrible, cross, pernickerty old thing," said Noble. Papa was not in the room or he would not have said this.

"Noble," said Mamma, "you must not speak that way of your Papa's aunt. Everything Aunt Bethiah does and says is for your good."

Gloom hung over the Manse. Not exactly because Papa and Mamma were going away, but because Aunt Bethiah was coming to take their place. She was only Papa's aunt anyway, and we thought her terribly old, but for all that she saw too much and heard too well, and I once heard Papa say the reason she knew how to bring up children so well was because she was never married.

The sky over the Manse that week didn't seem blue. Noble kept saying he would run away to the mountains, but he had said that so often that nobody believed him except Beth. She would beg him not to do it, while we all laughed at her, but Beth was used to being laughed at.

"I try very hard to love Aunt Bethiah," she said. No wonder Papa called her "Angel Beth."

During Aunt Bethiah's charge of the house, we youngsters lived mostly in the garden, or somewhere out of doors as much as possible.

Our Manse garden wasn't just an ordinary garden. It was the arena of wonderful make-believe sports and blood-thirsty performances as well as a fairyland of magical delights. Visitors to the Manse, on being shown round the garden would admire the flowers and say: "how well everything blooms with you, Mrs. Whiteside," or Papa's peas and cabbage would win high praise from them.

But these ignorant people stopped far short of taking in the real meaning of the place, and nobody thought it worth while to tell them that the walk under the laurels dare not be traversed after dark for it headed straight to

the Giants' den right under the copper beech tree. Neither did they guess that the fat old yew tree standing so round, and straight, and quiet at the end of the lawn was really an old Irish round tower, and that fair ladies, sometimes Janet, and sometimes Ida and even Beth, had, time and again, been seen flying across the lawn at their utmost speed to leap into it for safety—just in time, and no more—when pursued by the copper-beech Giant who was called Medusa." And after getting their breath they would peep out through its loopholes and make a mock of him as he stood grinding his teeth outside because he hadn't caught them and dragged them by the hair of the head down the laurel walk and into his den to eat them for his supper.

Once a strange minister who had been supplying for Papa, pointed to a certain spot in the garden and said: "What an unusually long branch that laburnum tree has thrown out. It must be a great age."

"That's not a 'burnum tree," Beth said, "that's our lovely horse Bucephalus that gives us rides."

And so it was. We all loved and claimed Bucephalus. When Noble rode astride him he was King William on his way to the Boyne to defeat King James. When Janet or I, in a long skirt of Mamma's that almost touched the ground, mounted him "side-saddle," we were Queen Elizabeth riding forth to see if there were any signs of the Spanish Armada coming, or sometimes we were merely Lady Clara Vere de Vere, going hunting.

It was a Saturday morning. We were all playing in the garden, even Janet who would soon be fifteen, for during Aunt Bethiah's rule she tried to keep outside the house just as much as we did. Aunt Bethiah could always supply

you with a job, especially in the sewing line, something always on hand to "hem;" hideous work we thought it.

We were tired out running. Suddenly everybody wanted to rest themselves by a ride on Bucephalus, and we were quarrelling who should get on his back first. Now Bucephalus might stand all day eating his head off, but let one of us desire to mount him and immediately someone else wished to do that same thing too. Indeed Bucephalus was often cruelly treated, two and even three perhaps, riding him at the same time, one behind the other, so that his poor back was bent nearly to the ground.

To-day everybody must have him at once, and there were pushing and shoving and angry words. Noble, being the strongest, managed to catch his green mane and swing himself up on his back.

"That's not fair," we all shouted.

Noble did not let on he heard us, but after he had a splendid gallop himself he said:

"Every one of you get up behind me and I'll drive him, for I'm the only one can drive a horse properly. If Janet drove him he might run away for he is very fresh to-day and she couldn't hold him in. She's only a girl anyway, and girls are fit for nothing."

The end of it all was that we every one got up on Bucephalus' back in a long string with Beth last—almost on his tail.

Noble beat Bucephalus mercilessly with a big stick, making him prance up and down, up and down, up and down. We were having a really exciting ride and we sang to the rhythmic prancing of Bucephalus:—

"To market, to market, to buy a fat pig,
Home again, home again, jiggety-jig."

Then, just as we were at the very height of our enjoyment, an awful thing happened. There was a crash! Bucephalus' back had broken in two and his cruel riders were thrown higgledy piggledy on top of each other on the grass.

That catastrophe sobered us! We were sorry then for putting such a heavy load on our dear old friend's back. He was too old to bear it and that was the last ride he would ever give us. Poor dear patient Bucephalus. We had murdered him! We were all very quiet now, and Beth was crying.

A bell rang at the front door. It was Sally calling us in to dinner. I am ashamed to say we seemed to forget Bucephalus lying killed in the garden, in our usual scuffle to reach the hall door first.

Just as we had got the length of the porch we were held up by Aunt Bethiah whom we had nearly knocked down in our mad rush. Both her hands were raised, and both her eyebrows half way up her forehead. What on earth did she see? What was wrong that she was so terribly shocked!

"Surely, surely you do not intend coming in from the garden to the house without first wiping your feet?" she exclaimed. That was just what we did intend to do, and we stood silent and sullen.

Aunt Bethiah stood, too, barring our way. After a minute, when we had stood looking at Aunt Bethiah and she had stared at us, Beth ran back and drew her tiny feet a few times across the mat at the porch door. No one else moved. Neither did Aunt Bethiah.

"No wiped feet, no dinner," was her ultimatum.

Just for a moment we intended to disobey. But we were desperately hungry, and Janet, who had more sense than the rest of us, stepped back and gave her feet a touch of the mat in that lofty way she had of her own. Of course then I followed her example, and Noble, with his face very red, rubbed his shoes so roughly that I thought he would tear the mat to pieces or pull the soles off his shoes. Hugh tried to imitate him more or less successfully and only then were we allowed to proceed.

Dinner was eaten in silence and as quickly as we could gulp it down, for we wanted to get away from Aunt Bethiah as soon as possible. All had finished and were waiting permission to leave the table, but Aunt Bethiah was still eating leisurely while we sat fuming. At last she put down her knife and fork and glanced down the table to see that everybody's knife and fork imitated her own in being left correctly side by side and every napkin neatly rolled in its ring. After that she took a long drink of water while we fidgeted and kicked each other's shins under the table.

Aunt Bethiah usually dismissed us with this speech:—"Now, children you may go, and do not get into any mischief." We were waiting for this benediction but instead she dived her hand down into the deep pocket of her skirt. Ten eyes followed it wonderingly as it re-appeared grasping her purse. What did that mean at all! A flutter of excitement followed the opening of it. Her long fingers fumbled in its depths. She had made a capture. Before ten eager eyes she held up a threepenny bit between her finger and thumb.

"This," she said in her grand manner, " is a present for a good child."

Everybody looked at Beth; they knew whom she meant, and Aunt Bethiah looked at her too. As for Beth her face shone with expectation. Aunt Beth handed her the threepenny as if she were presenting her with the Crown of England.

"You will always find, my dear children, that good conduct never goes unrewarded," she said. We had our doubts maybe about that statement, for many a time we were as good as gold and no threepenny-bits were forthcoming.

"I rubbed my feet well," said Noble boldly.

"So did I," said Hugh.

Janet was too high and mighty to seem as if she wanted anything, and I said nothing. Aunt Bethiah's purse closed with a click that was the death knell of all our hopes in that direction. "You may now go," she said, and for once she forgot to add "and do not get into any mischief."

CHAPTER VI.

BETH LOSES HER THREEPENNY-BIT.

Beth *was* excited! Never in her life before had she possessed more than a penny of her very own. About twice a year Uncle Hugh paid a short visit at the Manse. We all loved him, and thought him the exact opposite of Aunt Bethiah, yet we were longing in our hearts for the day that he would go away, for although he was a poor Minister, poorer even than Papa, he gave Mamma a shilling to divide between us. Beth's portion had never come to more than a penny, for Mamma went on the principle that the older you were the more you were entitled to. Janet, and Noble, and I got threepence each; Hugh got twopence, and there was only a penny left for Beth. But in those days, now long ago, the pennies were precious in poor Manses. We sometimes would earn one by weeding a walk in the garden, or pulling the gooseberries and black currants in their season. The black currants were horrible to pull, but we were paid a double fee for them. Beth was not yet able to earn anything.

She wore a little round apron with a pocket to one side of it, and in this little pocket she kept her closed hand with the precious threepenny-bit inside. The other she put in mine. "Come, Ida, and we'll tell everybody," she said.

The first to hear the wonderful news of course was Sally. "Look, Sally, look what Aunt Bethiah gave me."

Sally looked very closely at it and took the coin in her own hand, and bit it to make sure it was real. Then she turned up her eyes to the ceiling and waggled her head up and down to convey astonishment, and shook her fist in

the direction of the parlour. "Well, to be sure," she said, "well, to be sure! She'll leave you all her money yet, and we'll have the quare good times then, my wee dear."

"When I'm rich, Sally, I'll give you a whole lot," promised Beth as she pulled me to the back door. "Come up the loanen and tell Paddy and Biddy."

Paddy was where we usually found him, with his arms folded along the half-door, taking the fresh air and watching the hens squeezing against it trying to let Biddy know that it was time for their supper, and that they thought her clock must be stopped.

"Well, young ladies, how are yez the day?" he greeted us as he opened the half-door cautiously a very little way so as to let us in while keeping the hens out. Some of them proved too smart for him, and in they pushed between our feet, as bold as brass, to try to stir Biddy up to some sense of her duty.

The red glow from the peat fire showed up the shapeless heap of old clothes on a "creepie" that we knew was Biddy, engaged in her favourite occupation of looking into the fire. Hearing the stir she took the trouble to turn round on her stool, but without the extra exertion of rising she shouted and flapped her apron at the uninvited hens.

"Chase that big villain off the dresser, children dear, afore he breaks all the delf on me," she said.

It took some time and a good deal of shouting and s-s-shing and strong remarks on the conduct of the hens from both Paddy and Biddy, but at last all were ejected, and the half-door deftly closed on them.

This skirmish was trying to Beth's patience. "Look, Biddy, look, guess who gave me this?" she said, as soon as we could hear our own voices.

"Maybe it would be Miss Lark for gettin' on so well with your larnin'." Neither Paddy nor Biddy knew one letter of the alphabet.

"No, Biddy; you couldn't guess who it was. It was Aunt Bethiah!"

Biddy raised her hands up and down several times speechless. "She must be goin' to die an' her dividin' her money up that way," she said.

Paddy had returned from getting the door fastened, and was leaning against the dresser with his feet stretched out—another favourite attitude of his.

"Look, Paddy, what Aunt Bethiah gave me for being a good girl," and Beth held up the coin for Paddy to see.

"Is it a half-a-sovereign? My sight's gettin' dim of late, an' I'm not good at knowin' money seein' so little of it as I do these days."

"It's a threepenny bit."

"Is it so? Why the hens must be layin' with her ladyship!"

Beth shook her head. "In Belfast where Aunt Bethiah lives they have no hens, nor ducks, nor pigs, nor anything."

"Poor craythers," said Paddy pityingly, "it must be quare an' lonesome never to be hearing' a cackle, or a grunt, or the quack of a duck roun' your door the whole day long. Mabbe them Belfast people have grander houses, an' mebbe they have beef to their dinner every day of the year, but meat nor drink wouldn't make up to me for not hearin' the cocks crowin' in the mornin'."

"Well," said Biddy, "them Belfast people is just as well off with no fowl or such like varmin roun' their doors. They don't know what bother is an' can take their ease. Now just look at me havin' to rise off me sate and trudge

down that hill an' up again to bring them tinkers of ducks aff the wather."

"Let us do it for you. Biddy," offered Beth.

"It would be a charity to do that to save me poor feet from such a tramp, and yez mean it kindly, but mebbe if her oul' ladyship came to hear of it there would be ructions."

"She'll never know," said I. "Come on, Beth, it'll be great fun getting the ducks home."

"Well," said Biddy, "just to pleasure you I'll let you do it this once, an' be obleeged to you, an' mebbe I'll get a bit of a rest, for Paddy thinks he has enough to do when he tethers the goat and shifts her that she won't eat somebody's hedges." Biddy settled herself comfortably again on her "creepie," and resumed her study of the fire and we were away in a twinkling.

Hand in hand we ran down the green hilly field leading to the mossy hollow that was the happy hunting ground of Biddy's fine family of ducks, and we stood awhile watching them, for they amused us greatly. Some were swimming backwards and forwards in a stately manner on the green patch of water that lay at the lowest part of the field that Paddy and Biddy called the "flax-hole." Others were doing "stunts," such as standing upside down for quite a while with their heads under the water, and their tails pointing to the sky. Then suddenly their heads would come up and their tails go down, and they would sail soberly about, but it was only for a moment till up would go their tails again. Others did not lose a minute, but kept snuggling their bills deep down into the soft mud that lay round about the water, and by the look of them you would know it was something especially delicious they found underneath.

In the task of collecting the ducks Beth and I went

through more exercise than I'm certain Biddy ever did, but at last we got them all mustered together, for they knew quite well what was required of them. They bowed to each other saying with true duck politeness: "after you, please," and fell into rank, and the procession proceeded slowly and with dignity up the hill home.

We had been so occupied with the ducks that we had not noticed how dark it had got till a flash of lightning startled us, followed by a great "brattle" of thunder. Frightened out of our wits, and forgetful of our charges, we started to run as fast as our legs would carry us for the shelter and safety of Biddy's kitchen. We knew the rain would do the ducks no harm anyway, and once I looked back to see how they were behaving, and they weren't putting an inch to their step.

We dashed into the dim little kitchen, which now seemed as dark as night, but stopped dead as a familiar voice out of the gloom fell on our ears. It was Aunt Bethiah's."

"Is it possible, Ida, that you brought Beth out on such a threatening day without either coat or hat?"

"It was me brought Ida," piped up Beth, for Beth would never let anyone be blamed in the wrong if the fault was hers.

Aunt Bethiah immediately changed her tune from my thoughtlessness to Beth's shocking grammar.

"It was I who brought Ida, you should say."

"It was I who brought Ida," repeated Beth obediently.

The look on Paddy's and Biddy's faces while this correction was being given was curious to watch. They

smiled tolerantly as one would at something childish, but they had not the least idea of what it all meant. Nothing that Aunt Bethiah did or said, however, surprised them. You had even to talk a certain way to please her!

The rain was coming down in torrents. It pattered down the wide chimney and sizzled and spat at the red peats. It came down also through a hole in the roof, and was forming a puddle in the middle of the earthen floor. Aunt Bethiah was obliged to move her chair to avoid a shower bath. Biddy took this inconvenience all as a matter of course, but Paddy went over to the wall and took down an old frying-pan and put it over the puddle on the floor.

There was nothing peculiar to us in this proceeding, for we had been used to seeing the frying-pan there on many a rainy day, and when it was full Paddy would go to the half-door and empty it and replace it over the same spot. It struck us as a very simple and sensible plan indeed.

Not so Aunt Bethiah. She followed the movements of Paddy and the pan with unconcealed disgust, and marked disapproval on her face. She turned sharply to him and inquired, "Why, may I ask, do you not mend the hole in your roof?"

"Well began Paddy slowly, "Miss Temple, ma'am, I'm gettin' on for an oul' man now an' at times I have a touch of the rheumatics in one of me legs, an' surely ma'am you wouldn't ask me to climb up on the roof of a house on such a terrible saft day as this?"

"I certainly would not," said Aunt Bethiah, "ask you to do such a thing, and it isn't at all necessary for you to do so; but why may I ask do you not mend your roof on a dry day?"

"Why, Miss Temple, ma'am," the never a dhrop does that roof let in on us of a dry day!"

Aunt Bethiah got up immediately. For once words failed her. "Come, children, I think the rain is almost over now, and it's time we were going home for tea." She turned to Biddy and reminded her of what her errand had been.

"And, Biddy, don't forget that the pair of ducks for Sunday's dinner (for we expect a strange minister) must be delivered at the Manse on Friday evening, sure."

"That'll be all right, your ladyship. Just whatever you say will be done. I'll pick you the best of the flock, an' Paddy'll pluck them clean for you. He'll bring them down in good time on Friday, just as your ladyship says."

Paddy walked down the loanin with us. "That rain'll do a power of good," he said, "if you notice now, ma'am, every sort of weather's good for something," and he blethered on till we reached the Manse back gate, where he stood ready for more conversation had not Aunt Bethiah cut him short.

"Now see, my good man," she said, "and get that roof of yours mended at once, and don't let the rain come in any more. It must make your house quite damp."

"I will that, ma'am, an' the next time your back in this part of the country I hope it'll plaze you. The damp's healthy enough, an' the wee bit of a hole in the roof gives us the fresh air an' lets out the smoke, but if your ladyship thinks its betther closed up why shure we'll do it an' welcome, ma'am."

As we came through the kitchen and into the hall I felt a hot breath against my ear and a faint, choking, small voice said: "Ida, I have lost my threepenny bit!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FINDING OF THE THREEPENNY-BIT.

"Come upstairs, Beth," I said under my breath, and I took her up to the room that I shared with Janet and closed the door.

We turned the shallow pocket inside out, and shook and searched every bit of her clothing, we even took off the little shoes and socks and looked inside them, but nothing that we could do would bring the missing treasure before our eyes again.

That was Beth's first loss, and it was pitiful to see the state she was in, for she was just trembling all over.

"We will not let Aunt Bethiah know just yet," I said, "but we will tell everybody else and get them to look for it. Come away down and we'll tell Sally to keep a look out when she's sweeping." I said this to try and comfort Beth, but I knew very well it wasn't lost in the house, and if it was lost outside there was very little hope of ever seeing it again.

"You'll find it all right," said Sally, "don't fret about it. I'll sweep the whole house down in the mornin', and if it's inside the four walls you'll get it." She sat down and took Beth on her knee, and brushed back her hair from the hot little brow and said: "Now, my wee pet, it's sure to be found, certain sure."

Noble came in and we told him what was the matter.

"Why didn't you lose Aunt Bethiah instead," he said. I saw how sorry he was for Beth too, for under all Noble's teasing there was a kind heart, and anybody that wanted help in any trouble would always get it from Noble.

"Even if you don't find it," he said to Beth, "what's a threepenny-bit? We'll take up a collection for you next Sunday in Meeting. I'll go and look in the garden and round about. Surely between us all we'll find it. I wouldn't bother my head thinking about it." This was Noble's awkward way of trying to comfort Beth.

Janet said she would go with us up the loanin to look for it, and into Paddy and Biddy's, for she thought it might have been dropped there. Out we stole again and up to Paddy and Biddy's, keeping our eyes on the ground under our feet all the way.

Paddy and Biddy were greatly distressed. "It'll be foun' now, it'll be foun'," Paddy repeated, "for where would it go to? It's boun' to be someplace, sure it is."

Biddy got off her stool and seized the heather "bissom," and swept the floor and into every corner and even under the dresser. It was many a day since the floor had received so much attention, but she brought nothing to light except the dust and dirt that had lain at peace for so long.

Paddy came outside and down the hilly field with us, and right to the mossy hollow below where we had chased the ducks so lightheartedly such a short time ago. Among the grass and green rushes we hunted for a long while, and Paddy even waded through the mud poking everywhere with a stick. It was all useless, and we turned back again up the hill, Paddy with us, the only cheerful one amongst us.

"If it's not foun' now," he said, "it's sure to be foun' sometime, for it's a shinin' wee thing an' you couldn't pass it by. Mebbe the bit of wather down below there will dry up some day if there comes a drought an' as likely as not it

might be lyin' undher it. If you wait long enough you get everything."

Next day at school Miss Lark had to ask Beth three times where her thoughts were. Beth had just got into subtraction sums, and she was making a muddle of them.

"Can you take nine from two?" said Miss Lark.

"Yes," replied Beth. Then seeing the pained look on Miss Lark's face she hastened to say "No."

"Of course you couldn't take nine from two. If you had two apples could I take nine away?" Beth was sure this could not be done.

"Then if you can't take nine from two what do you say?"

"Nine from twenty-two."

Miss Lark looked heartbroken. "I'm afraid, Beth, you are not feeling well to-day, for you are saying very foolish things indeed, and I shall not ask you to do any more sums; perhaps your head is aching."

That afternoon when we came home from school and had had dinner we also spent hunting for the threepenny-bit. Going down again to the mossy hollow we found Paddy in the middle of the ducks making efforts to catch the unfortunate pair of victims that were destined for our Sunday dinner. Such an uproar as there was! All the ducks were quacking "murder," and doing their utmost to waddle away from him and prevent him from ambushing them. After great manœuvering, and with our assistance, he managed to get hold of one by the tail and give it to me to hold. I could hardly do so, it struggled so much, but Beth stroked its shining back and kept saying to it: "that's a good wee duck, that's a good wee duck," as I carried it up

the hill. Paddy was coming behind with another prisoner. We could not bear to see them killed and hurried away.

"Tell her oul' ladyship," he shouted after us, "that I'll have them plucked and down with her in less than no time, so she needn't be onaisy."

Beth was very quiet all that evening. Sally made pancakes for tea because Beth liked them, and Beth also liked to help Sally to make pancakes. Sally let her pour the batter on the "griddle" with a cup and watch it make nice rounds, then when they were nearly browned on one side Sally would slip a knife under them and turn them in a second, and as each pancake came off the "griddle" she would butter it hot and put sugar on the top of that. Sally had to make a fine quantity of them to satisfy us all, I can tell you.

We had shown our love of the pancakes by an empty dish, and the tea things and cloth being removed we all sat as usual, elbows on the table, supposed to be deep in our lessons. Dandydozer was strolling in and out over the books, with his haughty tail high in the air, and was in great good humour of which he tried to tell us by rubbing his cheek against ours. Hugh had got a bit of string out of his pocket, and was inviting him to have a game with it, and Dandydozer was quite agreeable to play with him. The fun got furious, and he would jump from one end of the table to the other after it, and when he got a hold of it he would lie down on his back chewing it. Aunt Bethiah, who was sitting in the arm chair, began to think that Dandydozer was no help to the learning of lessons, and she came over to the table, seized him by the back of the neck and put him out of the room altogether, closing the door tight after him.

Scarcely had she taken up her knitting again when the door opened abruptly, and Sally bounced into the room in such a desperate hurry that everybody took their eyes off their books and looked up to see what on earth was the matter with her. Aunt Bethiah looked very much annoyed at her over her spectacles, but Sally didn't seem to see Aunt Bethiah at all. It was for Beth Sally made tracks, and before all our astonished eyes she laid a threepenny-bit on Beth's open table book.

"There's your thruppeny bit, Miss Beth darlin'. Didn't I tell you I would find it if it was in this world at all. It takes me! I'm betther than all the polis in Innis."

Up jumped Beth and threw her arms round Sally's neck so tightly that Sally could say no more, while everybody was shouting: "Where did you find it Sally? Where did you find it?"

Aunt Bethiah could not make out what all this exceedingly improper fuss was about. "Was the money lost?" she enquired; but nobody answered her.

"Where did you find it, Sally? Where did you find it?"

Sally loosened the little arms which were nearly choking her. "Yez might guess from this till Tib's Eve and never guess where I foun' it."

"Where? where? where?"

"In the queerest place ever you saw."

"Where, Sally, where?"

"I was 'drawin' ' the duck for Sunday's dinner, an' the eyes nearly fell out of me head, for didn't I see it shinin' before me in the duck's craw. Aye, just lyin' there down in her craw."

"In the duck's craw!" everybody shouted.

"The duck's crop," corrected Aunt Bethiah from the armchair, but nobody heeded her.

"It must have dropped out of my pocket in the hollow when I was chasing the ducks to try to get them home for Biddy," said Beth in great excitement. "The duck must have picked it up and swallowed it. Isn't it well it didn't choke her?"

"It wouldn't be aisy to choke a duck," said Sally. "I mind I saw one once swallowing a dead mouse, an' it was a fearsome sight to watch, for her neck had to stretch terrible to let it down, an' it took a long while to do it. We could see from the swellin' on the outside the mouse goin' down, an' down, an' down, an' she strainin' her neck all the time till you'd think it would split up. An' when at last she managed to get it down, away she walked an' took her place at the head of the string of ducks that she was leadin' an' that had waited for her, an' she was as unconcerned as if she had only swallowed a green pea."

"Do you know which of the two ducks swallowed it, Sally?" said Beth.

"Of course I do, an' I tell you what I'll do, I'll put a sprig of parsley on her breast afore I bring her to the table on Sunday so that yous will know her, for she's the great oul' hero, so she is."

CHAPTER VIII.

MOLLY AND NORA, AND ANNIE-MARIA.

We had other dear friends farther up the loanin. On the hill behind Paddy and Biddy's, Grannie M'Neary lived with her three grandchildren—Molly and Nora, and Annie-Maria. Their father and mother died when they were so small that they hardly remembered them, and Grannie fetched them home to her little farm and mothered them. She did not allow them much time for play, but taught them to work inside the house and on the farm. How to milk, and churn, and make butter. How to scrub the tables and chairs with the fine sand that cocld be got in the neighbourhood. How to feed the greedy pigs, and how to cut the potatoes to plant in the ground for the new crop. On Summer afternoons when they came from school, Molly and Nora and Annie-Maria herded the cows, "hurded" they called it. It was a very pleasant task. You just sat on the green hill, maybe a spelling book lying open beside you, and now and again you glanced at next day's column of words to be prepared, or repeated twelve times' tables to one another, or chanted over and over again the lovely Irish poetry that would haunt Celtic minds for ever. Molly and Nora and Annie-Maria would also take out the coarse woollen stockings to work at that Grannie required them to knit for themselves.

A river flowed below Grannie's fields called M'Neary's River, and we would entice Nora and Annie-Maria down to it while Molly, the eldest, stayed faithfully with the cows.

Off would come our boots and stockings and we would wade about in its clear rushing water that was hurrying, hurrying, ever hurrying to get to Lough Neagh. It was full of little tiny fish that we called "sprickley begs," darting about in it. We thought it great fun to try to catch them with our hands, but they were so slippery that when you thought you had one you found you hadn't. They were far too small to eat, but occasionally we managed to catch a little trout with a bucket, and when we did, off home we ran with it proudly and Sally cooked it for us that very minute. We sat down at the kitchen table and Sally would give us a piece of bread-and-butter to eat to it. Nothing that we ever got at the parlour table tasted so sweet.

Sally always stood beside us "for fear of the bones." Once Beth got a bone in her throat and it was I who cried that time. Sally ran to the pantry and got an egg and broke it in a cup and made Beth swallow it at one gulp—and the bone was gone. Dear, dear Sally, you had a cure for all our troubles. The very love that beamed on us from your round moon-face helped in any and every difficulty.

Although Sally could give us a hasty slap right enough when we had done some harm in the kitchen, or brought in "clabber," as she called it, on her newly-washed floor, and would call us rascals, and villains, and vagabonds, yet no one else dare lay a hand on us, and if anyone had hurt a hair of Beth's head she would have killed them.

And the way she would get the boys out of trouble too! At the end of the field, just behind the garden, there was a rickety wooden fence. All of us except Beth took great delight in performing the daring deed of walking along its narrow top rail while it creaked under us. I remember long

years afterwards seeing Blondin walk across a rope stretched near the roof from one end to the other of a very high building. He balanced himself with long poles, and a great many people turned away their heads and could not watch the really awful performance. But I followed him with fascinated eyes, and I saw again the bold boys and girls of the old Manse walking the creaking fence while balancing themselves with outstretched arms.

When it came to be known, this practice was forbidden, but one day Hugh could not resist the thrill of the crazy fence and even tried to run along it, and down it came. He was not greatly hurt, only stunned, but the fence was broken and Papa found out who did it. Sally foresaw trouble coming, and told Hugh to go away up "the loanin" and stay out of sight till tea-time.

Papa came into the kitchen looking for Hugh, intending to punish him.

"Shure the oul' railin' was rotten," said Sally, "an' ready to fall down one of these days anyway."

"But," said Papa, "it is not the fence that matters, it is the disobedience. I had forbidden anyone to walk on that fence."

"Shure the child forgot," said Sally, "how would you expect them young ones to have the memories we have. They'll have enough to mind before they die. Now, sir, shure you'll not touch the wee boy, an' I'll go bail for him he'll never do it again; shure you won't, sir?"

And Papa was won over and let Hugh off with a lecture when he came in shame-faced to tea, Sally having meanwhile found him and told him it would be safe to venture.

But I was telling you about M'Neary's River. There

was a large stone with a hole in it on one of its banks that was said to have the power of curing warts. If any of us had a wart on finger or hand we held it in the hole of the stone repeating some charm that I forget, and when we took it out we always expected to find that the wart had disappeared. This miracle never happened to any of us, but for all that our faith was strong and we never gave up hope.

When we were tired and had exhausted the various charms of the little river we would dry our feet on the grass and pull on our stockings over wet legs and lace up our boots and join Molly again on the hill. Molly knitted all the time and she could "cast on," and "take off" and "turn the heel" with the greatest ease while we gave her due admiration that pleased her and made her feel superior. We brought our lesson books sometimes, too, and would be quite thrilled to open our geography and read that Lough Neagh was the largest lake in the British Isles. And there, on looking up, was Lough Neagh lying like silver in the distance below us, its waters stretching to the horizon.

Molly knew a lot of stories about it. She said that at one time long, long ago (we all loved stories that began ("long, long ago") there was a well where Lough Neagh is now and a wise man had said that if the well was ever left uncovered it would flood the whole country, so that everyone was careful to cover it when drawing their water. But one day a girl was drawing water from it and she was thinking all the time of her lover who had gone away and left her with a broken heart, and she forgot to put the cover on the well, and the water surged out. Nobody could stop it, and it flooded the country and drowned the people.

Molly would sing us a song about it, and we would all join in it and keep looking at the water while we sang:—

"On Lough Neagh's banks where the fisherman strays,
In the evening's cool declining,
He sees the round towers of other days,
In the waves beneath him shining."

Then suddenly we would notice that one of the cows was grazing too near the "pad," as a path is called in Ireland, and we took it in turns to run and turn her back to the field. One of the cows called "Cherry" knew that Beth was afraid of her, and when Beth would run and try to turn her Cherry would lift her head and shake her horns at Beth, and away Beth would run for all she was worth as if Cherry was at her heels. But all Cherry wanted to do was to frighten Beth so that she would leave her alone, and Cherry would just put down her head again and keep eating nearer and nearer the "pad," till Molly, or Nora, or Annie-Maria would jump up and turn her, for Cherry knew they weren't a bit afraid of her.

Molly could also tell us stories of the Irish saints that lived and walked on these hills and in these valleys hundreds of years ago, and whose whole aim was to do what was right and to serve God and deny themselves food and drink and comfort. She said even Saint Patrick, who turned the whole of Ireland from heathenism to the worship of the true God, might have stood preaching to the people on this very hill where we were sitting.

When Molly and Nora and Annie-Maria were older, Grannie died, and a friend in America sent them money to pay their way out in order to earn their living there, for the

little farm went to an uncle. It fell to their lot to be servants in the great city of New York. What a tremendous change that must have been for them! I'm certain their hearts were often nearly breaking when they thought of their dear old Irish thatched cottage home among the simple, kindly, God-fearing neighbours, and of the sweet summer days when they herded Primrose and Cherry and Daisy on one of the "holy hills of Ireland" that looks down on the glistening waters of romantic Lough Neagh.

CHAPTER IX.

OLD ANN BILL AND HER HENS.

When the Winter turned very cold and frosty the Manse hens struck and would not lay. But no matter how cold the weather proved, even if the snow lay deep on the ground and Jack Frost busied himself at night decorating our windows with flowers and leaves in fancy patterns to give us a pleasant surprise in the morning, when even Biddy's hens did not do their duty, there was still one place left where we were certain to procure eggs.

This was at Old Ann Bill's. "Orange Ann," as she was nicknamed, lived by herself in a one-roomed cottage, of which the bed in the corner took up most of the space. On frosty nights in the Manse when we had to go upstairs to icy bedrooms we often envied Ann Bill so snugly undressing by the fireside; or did she undress at all? For she always looked as if she had tumbled into bed the way she had tumbled out.

Ann had two means of livelihood—she knitted socks and she sold eggs. While daylight lasted she usually walked to and fro on the footpath before her door knitting, with the skein of wool round her neck—she never wound it, while all the passers-by that Ann could manage to stop must have a chat with her.

Ann was always hungry for news—a regular old gossip—always wanted to hear anything at all about anybody—what they did and what they said; where they were coming from and where they were going to. People used to say she knew what everybody had had for breakfast!

Nobody loved old Ann Bill because she talked too much, and especially because she liked to hear bad of anyone and better still to tell it over again.

Perhaps indeed her hens loved her for keeping them living in luxury. And that was the secret of her eggs in Winter—the hens lived and slept in the house with herself. Ann's bed occupied one corner, and their roosts another. Here at night perched the pampered hens as warm as toast, and resolved they would reward her kindness by laying when other people's hens refused.

When in Winter the eggs got scarce and dear, Papa thought it wrong to have an egg for tea, and would have ceased eating one only for fear of Sally. As for Sally herself, when it came to this time and Mamma urged her to have an egg Sally always said they disagreed with her. She and Mamma agreed that Papa didn't eat "half enough." Sometimes, when Papa had apparently finished his tea or breakfast, Sally, who was always hovering over us, would take another piece of toast and butter it and slip it on Papa's plate when she thought he wasn't looking.

"Send the childer to oul' Ann Bill's for eggs, Mem, there's not one in the house for the Master's tea," said Sally.

Beth got her little basket and away we went.

It was rather cold weather now for Ann to promenade on the front. She contented herself with standing at the open door so as not to miss anyone passing and thus perhaps be behindhand with the news.

"Is it half a dozen your Ma-ma wants? well mebbe I have them an' mebbe I haven't. Sit down awhile anyway an' tell me if your Ma-ma and Da-da bees well."

We said we were in a hurry and could not sit down, and Ann went over to the "dresser" to find the eggs.

"Houl-up your basket now till I count them intil it. That's wan—has Miss Lark any more new scholars? that's two—does thon oul' pensioner still come to see Sally? that's three—was the oul' lady from Belfast down with you lately? That's four, five—have Paddy and Biddy many fowl now?—has Biddy any eggs at all now at the present time? It's no wondher she hasn't for her an' Paddy starves the craythers keepin' them out in that coul' henhouse. Paddy and Biddy's just a lazy pair of oul blethers, that's what they are. Just houl your basket a minit an' wait till I go over to the bed an' look if that young black pullett has laid in it. I seen her jumpin' up on it a wee while ago." The black pullet had indeed done her duty and Ann reclaimed from the warm depths of the bed a brown egg.

"Feel the heat of it now," she said, "won't that one just be gran' for your Da-da's tea."

Ann's "tea-drawer" was all this time puffing and boiling in the warm ashes. "We must go now, for your tea will be too long drawn," I said.

"The longer the betther," said Ann.

"Do you take it three times every day?" enquired Beth.

"'Deed I never bother to count the times I take it. I just take it when I feel I want it. It's that that keeps me alive, for I'll be four-score come Christmas. What age might thon oul' Belfast lady be?"

I said I didn't know, which was the truth, for Aunt Bethiah kept her age to herself, but of course we considered her a Methusaleh.

When we got outside the smelling little house I

explained to Beth that four-score meant eighty. I was always vain of showing off before her how much I knew. Beth really believed that I had a vast stock of knowledge, and I let her think so.

Old Ann Bill's cottage lay on our way to school—at least one of the ways, for we had several. It was certainly not our direct way, but some of the others came up that road from Innis, and we liked to foregather and go to school in a body. Lucy and Tommy Crowe, and Bessie and Nellie Brown, and Baby Carroll, who was now able to walk to school with Lucy Crowe. Lucy called for her every morning and took care of her on the way.

Tommy Crowe was worse than all the girls put together. He was always throwing stones, or jumping ditches, or tormenting us in different ways, and we were never done reproving him. But one morning he led us all into mischief by saying: "Come on and we'll hide behind the hedge and shout 'chuckie, chuckie,' at old Ann Bill," for we often heard her calling her hens together that way when she wanted to feed them.

Of course we should never have listened to this bad boy's proposal, but we thought it would be an amusing thing to do. At the back of the cottage was a high, thick hedge, and we hid behind it and shouted, "Chuckie, chuckie, Old Orange Ann Bill; chuckie, chuckie, Old Orange Ann Bill." It was splendid fun indeed while it lasted. Ann heard us as we intended she should do, and came round to the back of the house scolding and muttering and shaking her fist at us. It was really grand, and we nearly killed ourselves laughing, but we had to scamper away too soon

for we had wasted time and were afraid we might be late for school.

Morning after morning for about a week we played this new and delightful game, but took care to come home by another road for fear Ann might be hid behind her door watching for us, maybe with a big stick in her hand. And every morning the game got funnier and funnier to hear Ann from the other side of the hedge scolding her very hardest and threatening what she would do on us if she caught us. But she never did. For her legs were stiff with rheumatism, and we could run like hares. We did it one morning too long, and were enjoying the thing to such an extent that we forgot all about the time and delayed behind the hedge, and though we ran as hard as ever we could we were late for school! There was Miss Lark seated at the head of the table waiting for us, and on one present but Effie Drean and Jenny Doran and Johnnie Dick, who lived in the opposite direction from us and did not come by our road. We felt terribly guilty, for Miss Lark had always taught us that it was unpardonable for children to keep their elders waiting.

Miss Lark bowed as usual to us, but her face was very set, and we slipped as quietly as we could into our seats. We wondered she did not say anything to us but began the Scripture lesson at once.

I always enjoyed the Scripture lesson, for Miss Lark made it so interesting and could relate the Bible stories beautifully, so that we could imagine we saw the whole eastern scene and the people in their costumes, so different from ours, and their peculiar customs; she could describe them all.

To-day it was a particularly nice lesson, and it struck me as being the loveliest story ever I had heard, but of course I had heard it before. It was about Elisha and the bad children calling the dear old man, who had lost the hair on his head with old age, names. "Go up, thou bald head." "Go up, thou bald head," they kept shouting at him, till in the middle of their wickedness they got an awful surprise. They were so occupied tormenting old Elisha, who was a specially good man, that they did not notice two big monsters of bears coming down towards them out of the wood where they lived. The bears rushed at the children, and the frightened children did everything they could, you may be sure, to get out of their way. But it was all of no use. The bears were in the middle of them eating them up! They devoured (that means ate up) two hundred of them! Two hundred! Such a number of children to be together all at the same time! I fancy it must have been a school fête or some great gathering of children out to enjoy themselves for the day. That was twice as many as were in our own Sunday School. And the poor Mothers! What would they do when they came to look for their little children and found they had none any more! It was a beautiful story! We could picture it all; the calling the names, the old man turning on them, the bears springing out of the wood, and the children running as fast as their little legs would carry them. But they were too late. The bears were catching them and devouring them; that "devouring" was a dreadfully thrilling word! And here were we feeling so safe and happy sitting in our pleasant schoolroom where nothing harmful could come near us, listening to dear Miss Lark and watching her twisting round and round her long curl as

she related this enchanting story of what happened to really bad children, who deserved it, long, long ago.

Miss Lark finished her story and we were feeling particularly comfortable and happy. At least that was the way *I* felt one minute, and the next! well, I couldn't describe properly how I felt, for didn't Miss Lark suddenly turn and apply the story to us.

Looking sterner at us than I had ever seen her kind face do before, and dropping her long curl, she said: "You think this is a fine story, I am sure, and you wonder at the wickedness of those children in calling the good old prophet Elisha names in days long gone by. But I know of children of the present day who, again and again, and very likely this morning were doing exactly a similar thing. I cannot tell you the pain it has caused me to hear that *my* pupils—children coming to *my* school—whom I have taken such pains to train to be good and kind especially to the old, that these children should be guilty of similar conduct as that of the bad children in the Bible story who lived thousands of years ago.

"To think," continued Miss Lark, "that *my* pupils could call names at a poor old creature almost eighty years old, who lives alone and tries to make an honest living by keeping fowl and selling their eggs so that she may get food to eat and a fire to warm her, and try to keep a roof over her head, and procure clothing, and that you have all this without doing anything for it. To think that you actually took a pleasure in calling that poor old person names—shouting "chuckie" at her from behind a hedge! Dreadful conduct, dreadful indeed! And all I can say is,"

concluded Miss Lark, "that it is well there are no bears in this neighbourhood!"

We were all, I believe, just thinking that ourselves before Miss Lark came to the end of her story, for if those children deserved to be "devoured," did not we deserve to be "devoured too? I kept my head down while trying to watch the faces of the others. Every head (except Effie's and Jenny's and Johnnie Dick's, who were innocent and were having the treat of their lives enjoying our confusion) was bent, while Beth was crying and so was Baby Carroll. I believe those two were thinking that the bears would be waiting for them on the road going home!

"Now," said Miss Lark, "I command you every one who was guilty of this unkind, un-Christian act, to apologize to Mrs. Bill on your way home, and tell her how sorry you are for your conduct, and that you will never do such a thing again."

This was punishment indeed. But not so bad as the bears. When we came the length of Ann's ever open door we just shouted a "Sorry, won't do it again," and fled before Ann had time to come out and forgive us.

Never afterwards did we pass her or her house without putting out our tongues and calling her names again, but this time under our breath. What we called her now was "Clash-beg," for that is the Irish for a tell-tale.

CHAPTER X.

COMING FROM SCHOOL.

We almost never came home straight from school. A wild place called "Lark's Wood" lay behind Miss Lark's cottage, where an hour passed like ten minutes. It was covered with briars and whins, and sloped down steeply to a much wider and deeper river than M'Neary's River. How rivers did fascinate us, perhaps because there was danger connected with them! Indeed, I have often wondered since how it was that as the Irishman said we were not "drowned over and over again.'

Along the banks of the river grew hazel nut bushes, spreading their branches well over the river, and along these branches we would stretch to gather the nuts.

Our attraction of the wood was Miss Lark's old bad-tempered goat, feeding on I don't know what, for nothing but bramble and gorse bushes were to be seen. Usually there was a kid also—a darling—and the fun we had unknown to "Larkie" with the old goat and the young kid was fast and furious.

Had Miss Lark ever chanced to see us teasing old "Nanny" we would certainly have got a good lecture, and probably would have been kept in next day. But while she was thinking of us as well on our way home by this time, far from that being the case we were playing ourselves at the expense of her cross old goat, pretending that we wanted to catch her beard so that we might tempt her to run at us with her horns lowered and butt at us. Had we not known

she was tethered and that we could get out of her reach, we might not have been so bold. When she came to the end of that tether we would turn and mock her and make faces at her, while she became crosser and crosser and strained at her tether to get at us. The kid on the contrary welcomed us with delight. It frisked about us kicking up its hind legs and going through all sorts of twists and turns while the old lady looked disapprovingly on. It was as hard to believe that this solemn old goat went through the same comical feats in her own youth, as that our frolicsome youngster would one day be a crabbed old goat.

At other times we left Jenny Dolan to her own gate, for we pitied her having to go all by herself and none of the others went her way. Also we always got our reward. Mrs. Dolan would present us each with an apple or a pear—we always kept friendly with those who had orchards—or maybe she would be baking at the time we arrived at the gate and we always stopped politely there, and waited, and presently Jenny would fetch us out "pieces" of hot soda-bread, just off the "griddle," swimming with butter. This refreshment helped us to face the long journey back that we had imposed on ourselves.

Often on our way home from school we met a "character" with whom we always enjoyed a long and amusing conversation. He lived near Innis with a brother who also was poor but who shared his food and bed with him, for "Prayin' Paddy," as he was called, could earn nothing. People gave him coppers sometimes if they met him on the roads, but he never begged at the doors.

He was elderly now, a little man with ragged clothes and an old hat that his long hair came right out through.

People said that his hat was the same age as himself.

He was called "Prayin' Paddy" because he always went about mumbling prayers to himself, and often was to be seen kneeling at the roadside or in the fields praying. Poor Paddy! It was said that he had been intended for a priest in his youth but that his mind gave way. Everybody knew that Paddy wasn't "right in the head," but he was a good, harmless creature, and everybody was kind to him.

If you met Paddy and gave him a halfpenny he would say, "Thank you kindly for your endowment," for he always used the biggest word he knew.

It was the Latin language that more than anything else dominated Paddy's poor brain, at least what he took to be Latin, and he fancied himself a fine Latin scholar. The first question when we met Paddy on the road was always: "so you learn the Latin at Miss Lark's school?" and we were always thankful to reply that we did not. "That's a big loss to you that you don't learn the Latin," he would say, "but mebbe Miss Lark doesn't know it herself. I could give her some lessons in it." We said we were sure she knew it for she knew everything.

"My Papa knows Latin," said Beth proudly one day when Paddy was discoursing on "the Latin" as he called it.

"All the clargy do," said Paddy. "Nobody that doesn't know the Latin could be a clergyman, for at one time I was one meself."

"Why, how did you give it up, Paddy?"

Paddy looked troubled. "I don't mind much about it, mebbe I committed some great sin, but I still keep on prayin' day and night, an' I know the good Lord above listens to me just as ready as if I was at the altar."

We felt sorry for him. "He does, of course, Paddy, He does," we said.

This answer always seemed to cheer him and he went back to his old craze.

"Well, now, it's the quare pity yez don't learn the Latin for it's the language they speak in Heaven."

"Is that what they talk there?" said Beth, "I thought it was Irish."

"Latin," declared Paddy, "is what the angels and archangels talk."

"What's the difference between an angel and an archangel, Paddy, could you tell us?"

"I could. It's just the difference between the gentry and the commonality."

"Maybe," suggested Beth, "the archangels have more money."

"There are no endowments in heaven. I'll not need any there. I just keep prayin' all the time to get there."

"That's right, Paddy. You'll be happy in Heaven," and when we said this Paddy always brightened up and would hark back again to the old subject, "It's the quare pity now you young ladies is ignorant of the Latin."

"Maybe you'd teach it to us, Paddy."

"If you promise to mind it I'll tell you some words of it. Now repeat after me: 'Oxus, Doxis, Glorioxus, Amen'."

The branches of the trees in the Manse garden overspread the road, and on wet evenings—for, as Sally said, we had "every sort of invention"—we climbed up them and when anyone passed underneath we gave them an unexpected shower bath. Most of those who happened to get

one were not grateful and bestowed anything but a blessing on us as they looked up to see where the sudden shower came from. But when "Prayin' Paddy" came shuffling along below us, muttering his prayers, and felt a splash over his head and shoulders he would look upwards as if thanking Heaven and exclaim: "Oxus, Doxis, Glorioxus, Amen."

Soon the time came when there was no longer any "Prayin' Paddy" wandering the roads, and we children missed him. One day someone saw him kneeling by the roadside. They thought this nothing unusual, but on speaking to him—for no one passed Paddy without speaking kindly to him—there was no reply. Never again would anyone laugh at poor witless "Praying Paddy"—for all his prayers had at last been answered!

CHAPTER XI.

THE RIDE IN THE DONKEY CART.

But for downright, wild, jolly fun, give us a ride in Effie Drean's donkey cart!

Effie lived too far from school to walk there, and her father allowed her to drive in the donkey cart. It was just an ordinary little cart such as farmers use, and was painted a bright red. We sat on the floor—as many of us as could cram in—our backs leaning against one side and our feet stretched out towards the other. The drawback of that glorious jaunt came afterwards when we had to pay up for it by trudging back on "Shanks' mare."

Effie was a dear, but she was a rather stupid girl at sums. We bigger girls sat in the desk along the wall supposed to be working away at our sums while Miss Lark took the lower classes.

"Ida, do help me with this horrible sum," whispered Effie, "Dear how I hate reduction, I wish it had never been invented. Who cares how many ounces are in a ton or what good would it do them if they did. If you help me with it I'll give you a ride the length of the big hill. Do look at it and see if it will please Larkie"—this was not a "nickname" but a pet name we had for dear Miss Lark.

I glanced over it and thought it would not, and just then Miss Lark suddenly said: "What are you two girls talking about when you should be doing your sums?"

"I cannot do mine," said Effie.

"Bring it up to me." Effie brought her slate and stood beside her. Miss Lark looked at it and then made a sound

of annoyance like tck, tck, tck, with her tongue against the roof of her mouth. "I'm perfectly ashamed of you, Effie, a big girl like you, you are not much better than your own donkey."

We were always glad to get an excuse to laugh in school, but poor Effie blushed.

"If you would learn your tables properly you would have no difficulty in doing it. If you don't store up these things in your mind when you're young you're head will be an empty one when you're old, for one can't learn when one is old. That's why we have to learn as much as we can when we're young."

This was a lecture that fell constantly from Miss Lark's lips, but we never could be brought to care what our old heads would be like. It was a long time till that anyway! People could do what they liked when they were old, and we certainly wouldn't want to do reduction sums!

But reduction sums and all other silly stupid things that Miss Lark placed such importance upon were completely forgotten when we scrambled helter-skelter into Effie's donkey cart.

After school that day Effie waited with Fanny and the cart at the corner, out of sight of the cottage, for Miss Lark did not approve of us riding in it, we were so reckless that an accident might happen and some or all of us be killed. People that we passed on the road who turned and watched us as far as they could, had told Miss Lark about our "antics," as they called them, and the way we carried on, and the noise we made along the roads, and the tearing up-hill and down-hill and the beating of the donkey. Besides, Miss Lark thought we should all go home straight from

school and have our dinner, but if the fun was good we never gave a thought to dinner.

Fanny, the donkey, was undoubtedly lazy. She was overfed and she got a long rest while Effie was in school, but for all that she preferred to walk soberly along all the time if she had been allowed to do so.

I got into the cart first, and next Lucy Crowe, and then Bessie and Nellie Brown, and of course Beth always came with me wherever I went. Tommy Crowe begged Effie very hard to let him have a lift too, but she would not have him since the day he clambered over the front of the cart and rode on the donkey's back. He pulled Fanny's ears and got her into such a bad tantrum that she nearly kicked the bottom out of the cart.

When we had all climbed in over the back and got seated on the floor Effie gave the donkey a smart whack.

"Go on, Fanny," she shouted.

Fanny flung up her heels and away she went. For about two minutes she galloped like mad, gradually she got slower and slower until she had soon fallen into her steady every-day walk.

"Go on, Fanny," shouted Effie.

"Go on, Fanny," shouted Lucy.

"Go on, Fanny," shouted Bessie and Nellie.

I shouted too, and even Beth coaxed Fanny to go on.

Then we all shouted together to Fanny to go on, but even that volume of sound had no effect on Fanny's conduct, and it took Effie's stick to persuade her into a trot again.

It was splendid while it lasted, the galloping and the rocking of the cart, and the bumping up against one another. These droll movements that we could not help

made us all laugh till the tears rolled down our cheeks, and we rolled about on the floor together helpless.

The people on the road looked after us anxiously, and some of them shouted at us to watch ourselves, or we'd be killed if we didn't take care. But we were out of sight and hearing long before they had finished their warning.

At the rate we went at it did not take us a long time to come to the "big hill." It loomed up before Fanny's blinkers like a mountain, and at that frightful sight Fanny stopped dead, and no coaxing nor beating would make her move a foot till we had everyone got out of the cart. Then when she was quite sure of that, and felt only Effie's weight behind her, she started at a fairly good pace, for she knew now that she was getting near home and longed for the luxurious rest she would have in her own field. That's what she liked best in life. Just to lie and roll herself over and over on the cool green grass.

It was a poor tame affair to return just walking primly on the same road that we had raced over a short time ago, and before starting to do so we took a rest. Sitting in a circle in the middle of the road (there were no motors in those days), we played "Jacks" with nice little smooth stones we found for ourselves, and watched to see if anyone would turn up to give us a "lift" even part of the way home.

To our joy we heard a clatter in the distance that became louder and louder and down the "big hill" came Barney Bleary with his horse and cart. We knew them both well and saw that fortunately the cart was empty. We hailed him and he pulled up. "Would yez like a ride, young ladies? yez are far from home. I suppose it was thon wee

dunkey brought you this length. I met her on the top of the hill, she doesn't like to kill herself."

"Yes, Barney, yes, we would love a ride home."

"Well, hoist yourselves in at the back while I houl' the mare. She doesn't like to stan'."

Up we climbed one after the other, having got Beth in first, and finally all tumbled head over heels in the bottom of the cart, for the mare started before we were ready, which added much to our enjoyment.

Barney's big, strong mare was just too willing. She had not been working for some days, and was what Barney called "ree," meaning "fresh." Barney did not keep her back, and if we had been jolted in Effie's cart, and our bones well shaken, we were ten times more knocked about in Barney's. Just thrown about like ninepins, and tossed up and down, and could not hear our own voices for the rattle of the big cart. Oh! it was great! but all too short. Barney pulled up at the turn of the road and let us off.

"Thank you, Barney, a thousand times. It was a lovely ride."

"Yez are welcome, young ladies," Barney said.

So we were not so very late getting home, thanks to Barney.

CHAPTER XII.

LESSONS AND COMPOSITIONS.

We all admired Miss Lark as well as loved her. Her kind dark eyes were like velvet, and her brown hair was parted in the middle, and coiled up behind with one lovely long curl hanging down over her shoulder, which she had a habit of twisting round and round while she was hearing our lessons. As long as she kept twisting this curl we felt everything was serene, but when she dropped it we feared what was coming. We knew that she supported herself and her Mother by teaching this little school, and children as we were, we knew that she did her best to train us in everything that was right both for this world and that to come. Once she set us to write a composition on our slates in school on "What I would do if I was a Millionaire." Some of us would "build hospitals," and some of us would "give away all our money to the poor," but Bessie Brown, whose heart was better than her spelling, said: "If I was a millyuner I would give my dear Miss Lark so much money that she would never have to teach naughty little boys or girls any more."

Baby Carroll had now got the length of knowing "O." This was so far so good. The trouble now was that she called every letter "O."

"Now Baby," said Miss Lark pointing to "S," "what is the name of this letter?"

"O' said Baby.

"No, no, it isn't round at all, Baby, it's nearly like your own hair, so remember it by that," and she stroked Baby's short golden curls that clustered over her head.

"Now tell me the name of it," said Miss Lark, still pointing to S."

"Curly," said Baby, "just like your own lovely hair," and she fondled the long dark curl that hung over Miss Lark's shoulder.

Miss Lark was nearly too tired to smile. "Say 'ess' six times," she said.

"Curly ess, curly ess," Baby repeated over and over again, till Miss Lark said: "That is quite enough."

"And this one here with the stroke across it," said Miss Lark, pointing to T.

"Curly ess."

"No, no, try again. Don't you see it has no curls, and is straight with a straight line across it. What do you get for breakfast, Baby?"

"Porridge."

"What do you drink?"

"Milk."

"What do Papa and Mamma drink?"

"Tea."

"Now you have it. Say the name of it now. Remember it by breakfast. What is it?"

"Porridge," said Baby."

"No."

"Milk."

"No."

"I have it now," said Baby, and she clapped her hands. "T. T. T. Now I know three letters. Round O, Curly Ess, and Porridge." She had forgotten it already.

No wonder Miss Lark looked tired when she called us up to give in our compositions. It was Monday, and every

Monday we had to have a composition because we had all Saturday free and time to do it. On Friday Miss Lark had said she would allow us each to choose our own subject. This was far harder than if she had told us what to write about, but after thinking over it for a long time I made up my mind I would write about King Alfred. He was my favourite King in history.

I was always so sorry for him having to live in a poor cottage when his enemies, those wicked Danes that had no business in England at all, were trying to get a hold of him. He that should have been living in a Palace with a golden crown upon his head. I wrote a lovely composition on him and told the story of the neat herd's wife telling him to mind the cakes while she was out, and that he was thinking so much of the best way to overcome his enemies that he let the cakes burn. I said that the neat herd's wife put the cakes in the "range" to toast and told how she scolded him when she came back and found them burnt, for she did not know he was the King.

When Miss Lark was correcting our compositions we always kept watching her face; while reading mine it had a very different look from what it had when she was teaching Baby Carroll her letters, and she began to smile and quite lost her tired look.

She finished and looked up smiling and said to me: "You have told the story of King Alfred very nicely indeed, but you didn't know that you put something quite amusing into it. You said the neat herd's wife put the cakes on the 'range' to toast. My dear, ranges were not invented for a thousand years and more after King Alfred's time. There was no such thing even when your father and mother were

young. The fire at which King Alfred watched the cakes—or rather, didn't watch them—was just on the floor in the middle of the hut, and the smoke went out—but a good deal stayed in—through a hole in the roof above it."

If my composition made Miss Lark smile, Bessie Brown's made her laugh outright when she came to the end. Bessie was the youngest in our class and small even for her age. She was a dear soft little thing, and had very quiet ways. She was never rude or rough, but helpful and kind, and everybody loved Bessie.

Such a funny subject as she had chosen for her composition! It was "The Mouse." Miss Lark said she would read it out to us. I never forgot it, and here it is:—

"The mouse has four feet and a tale, he has great long whiskers, but he is a dreadful thief and steals everything he can lay his hands on. His eyes are as brite as black beads and he lives in nice little holes in the wall. People ketch him in traps if they can, but they can't. What he likes best for supper is cheese, and if you put cheese in the trap you will be sure to ketch him. When a mouse grows big it turns into a rat."

We saw the fun, without having to be told, in Bessie's composition about the mouse turning into a rat, and we joined in Miss Lark's hearty laugh, glad to be able to do that in school without being reproved. Bessie laughed too with the rest of us, but she didn't know what it was at till Miss Lark said: "No, Bessie, how could one animal turn into another? A mouse could no more turn into a rat than you could turn into a cow." Fancy her turning into a cow! After that we used to call Bessie "Mousie" for a pet name, for it suited her.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNDAY EVENING AT THE OLD MANSE.

Never did we miss Sunday School or "Meeting." Wet or dry made no difference. That anybody should ever stay at home was as unthought of as not to go to bed at night or get up in the morning.

There was an afternoon Sunday School in Innis Schoolhouse, taught by Mrs. Good and another lady. The boys attending it behaved very badly and tried to impose on Mrs. Good. They had had to sit so quiet all the morning that now they were just bursting with high spirits. We were required to learn certain chapters of the Bible from beginning to end—one verse each Sunday—and when we had repeated the verse Mrs. Good took a gold pencil case that she wore on a black ribbon round her neck and made a mark like a small v. at the end of the verse to show we had said it and were to go on to the next. Some of the boys would rub the mark out with a rubber and say the same verse over and over again. Noble used to boast to us (not to Mamma or Papa) that he had spent two years at the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. It was more for mischief than anything else that *he* did it.

Sunday School was closed with a prayer. Mrs. Good went down on her knees and we all had to kneel too. While she prayed the boys would rise as quietly as they could and slip inch by inch nearer the door. The most daring of them would actually have his hand on the latch ready to open it and rush out the very moment the "Amen" came. They counted on Mrs. Good being old and stiff and that it would take her a little time getting up off her knees.

But one afternoon Mrs. Good evidently heard the noise and suddenly stopped her prayer and looked round. Nearly every boy was out of his place, some half-way down the room and others quite near the door, and one had his fingers on the very latch. Rising from her knees quicker than the boys thought possible, she gripped the boy who had been holding the latch by the collar of his coat and marched him back to his place, and commanding all the other boys to kneel down again, she resumed her prayer. When it was over she warned the boys not to move till all the girls were outside the door, and every Sunday afternoon afterwards this was her rule. How we laughed and jeered at them when at last she allowed them to go and they looking so sheepish as they came out.

Our lessons for next Sunday had to be prepared after tea. Papa was usually away preaching in some distant part of the congregation, and Sally went to see her friends on Sunday evenings. Mamma had a hard time of it trying to keep us in order and making us behave as we should do on the Sabbath Day. But oh! it was a tiresome day to youngsters who were not accustomed to sit such a long time on their seats.

"Now children, dear," Mamma would say, "You have six days for play, but this is God's Good Day and must be kept holy because one of His commandments tells us so. He has put 'Remember' before it because He knows our hearts and knows that we are likely to forget it. We should always keep it in our minds all the time that this is 'God's Good Day.'"

"Mamma," said Beth, "will God's Good Day soon be over?"

"Yes, darling, for you it will, you are getting sleepy. If you can say your hymn and catechism and text you may go to bed."

"Hear me my hymn, Mamma, please."

"He will gather, He will gather
The gems for His Kingdom,
All the pure ones, all the bright ones
His loved and His own."

"What are gems, dear?" Beth did not know. "They are very precious things like diamonds, and rubies, and pearls that ladies wear in their rings and brooches; they are far more precious than gold. And Jesus calls little children whom He loves and who love Him His gems, because they are so precious to Him. Isn't that a beautiful thought darling, that you are one of Jesus' gems?"

"Oh! Mamma, I am glad I am one of Jesus' gems!"

Beth's eyes were closing with sleep, and Mamma carried her off to bed without hearing her catechism. "You three have your lessons ready to say when I come back," she said.

The very instant Mamma left the room lessons were forgotten and we began to "carry on." Noble caught my long plait of hair and held it up high above my head. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I want to exhibit to you a Chinese, and I intend to preach on that subject this morning and take this young lady for my text."

Up he got on a chair and began: "I wish you all to take a good look at the person whom I hold by the hair of the head." (I could not get away from him for it hurt me to tug myself free). "She must have come from China for she wears a pigtail down her back. Now you all know that the Chinese are as bad as can be. We have to send mis-

sionaries out to them to try to make them good. But I have another plan for improving them. Maybe if I cut off this wicked pigtail it might turn her into a good girl. I shall do it before your very eyes and if that does not make an improvement in her I will have to cut off her head."

Noble often used to get up on a chair and preach when Papa and Mamma were not there. (There was no doubt about what he should be when he grew up for he had this gift, and in after life became an eloquent preacher and what was better, a good Minister, fearless and greatly daring in his Master's service). He got down from his pulpit and ran to Mamma's workbasket to get her scissors while Hugh held me until Noble pretended he would cut off my plait. We were all talking and wrestling so that we failed to notice the door open and Mamma standing horrified in the doorway.

I must say we were downright ashamed of ourselves and ran for our seats and started mumbling our catechism, while Mamma, looking very pained indeed, took her seat again at the head of the table and commenced to reproach us.

"It vexes me very much that you should behave in such an uproarious way on the Sabbath evening. You, Noble, are a big boy now, and should know better. Think of the example you are setting Hugh, for he copies everything you do. I fear there were not many lessons learned while I was away." She was right.

Hugh said he knew his and placed the books before her. However, when he tried to say them he "himmed and hahed" as Mamma said, and she gave him back his books and went on with her reading of "The Missionary Herald."

The next thing to distract us from our lessons was

Dandydozer. He jumped upon the table as he was accustomed to do when we were at lessons, and unfurled his great plume of a tail against our faces. Hugh pulled it and he grew angry and gave him a sharp scratch. Just then someone came to the door and Mamma had to leave the room again. It was a messenger to ask Papa to go to see a member of his congregation who was ill and had taken a turn for the worse.

Mamma had to sit with the stranger in the drawing-room so she came back and told us as soon as we had our lessons learned we might go to bed.

Very soon we thought we knew our lessons and decided to go upstairs so as to avoid seeing Mamma again that night. Dandydozer was sitting on the stairs and we fought for who would get him to sleep with them. Dandydozer hated to be pulled about and scratched us all, but I succeeded in carrying him off. I was lying happily with the dear darling so soft and lovely and warm lying in my arms when I heard the door shut on the visitor and Mamma go into the parlour. It was merely to get the catechism, and she came upstairs and into my room with it in her hand. I managed to get through fairly well with the answer although it was "What is effectual calling?"—a celebrated hard one. Mamma was not however paying so much attention to my reply as listening to something she thought she heard somewhere in the room.

"What is that noise, Ida?" she said, "under the clothes?" She turned them back and there the big black beauty lay stretched out, seeming to be twice his size, and so happy and comfortable that he had given himself away by his boisterous purring, and I who loved to have him

through the long dark night for company while Janet was away was forced to part with him. Mamma carried Dandy-dozer away, very unwilling to go, and I heard her chasing him downstairs.

I then heard her crossing the lobby to the boys' room. I knew she had the catechism with her and I slipped out of bed and opened my door to hear how they would acquit themselves, for I guessed it would be badly, and I wanted to hear it for the fun of the thing. I was right; they stumbled and stuttered and put in the wrong words in the wrong places—hard words they were too that we didn't know the meaning of, and I heard her say, "Here is the catechism and I'll be back in a quarter of an hour to hear it."

I forced myself to keep awake till she came back, and when she did I crept to the door and peeped in. They were both pretending to be sound asleep with the clothes over their heads and Noble was snoring very loud. Mamma pulled the clothes from off their heads and at that they had both to burst out laughing.

Of course they couldn't say it correctly, and I heard Mamma say: "I'll stay here until it *is* learned," and she gave the book back to them and sat down on the edge of the bed.

I suppose they did then really see that they couldn't get off with it, for I heard Mamma go downstairs in about ten minutes.

She told us next day that Papa came in tired out after walking three miles from where he had been preaching, but when he heard that old Mrs. M'Nab was dying, he did not take off his boots but started out again. I often used to wonder if we would ever grow up to be as good and unselfish and keep the Sabbath Day as well as Papa and Mamma.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS.

You will wonder why I have not mentioned Janet this long time, and you may be sure she was not with us when we called old Ann Bill names, or galloped madly in Effie Drean's donkey cart. Janet had gone to a boarding school near Belfast after the summer holidays. Papa could never have afforded to do this. It was Aunt Bethiah who was paying for her. We found out afterwards how good Aunt Bethiah had been all along to Papa and Mamma. I do not know how the Manse children would have been fed and clothed and educated without her help.

It now wanted a short time of Christmas and Janet was coming home for the holidays. There was much excitement in the Manse the day she came. To tell the truth we were a little afraid of her at first, for she seemed to us like a grand young lady. She had grown a good deal; her skirts were longer, and her hair, instead of being in a plait down her back, was tied up with a big ribbon bow. She took on quite an important air, and expected us to look up to her and obey her.

We could easily see, however, that she was very glad indeed to be at home again. It was nice to get the good Manse food, which was plain and wholesome, and had a very different taste from what they got at "Greenbank." She also rejoiced in her liberty, and being able to go in and out as she pleased again, and perhaps most of all she liked to get lying longer in the mornings.

Miss Spark kept a really strict school, with plenty of

hard rules to keep. They were fined a halfpenny if any of these were broken.

For supper in the Manse we had always porridge. Janet had sometimes turned up her nose at it, but at school she got no supper at all! She told us that many a night she would have given anything for a plate of the old Manse porridge with Strawberry's rich milk to it.

And the rising bell! The horrid old thing clanged through the house every morning at half-past six o'clock. "It would wake the dead," she said, the vicious way Katherine, the housemaid, did ring it! If they were not dressed and down in the schoolroom by five minutes past seven they must put a halfpenny through the hole in the top of the missionary box that decorated the schoolroom mantelpiece. A halfpenny now and again didn't break you, but if you broke this rule often it ran away with your money, and you could not afford to buy a bun from the bun girl who came every day after dinner into the back hall with large succulent Paris buns at a halfpenny each.

Breakfast did not take place till eight o'clock, and the hour preceding it must be spent in either studying or practising. The last was the worst. She described the misery of going into a fireless room on a frosty morning to practise. Your fingers became so numb that they refused to move. And indeed she had chilblains on her hands, what she never had had before, and said they were caused by this cold practising.

When she poured forth these complaints, Papa would quote "it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth," and ask her could she tell who said that. She said "David," and Noble said it was Paul, and Papa said they

were both wrong, and should know their Bibles better, for it was Jeremiah.

Miss Spark's boarders also had to go for a long walk every day—a thing they loathed so much that they made every sort of excuse to get out of it, such as a cold in the head or toothache. Beth and I listened with open mouths to Janet's entertaining stories of school life. Sarah, the cook, came from Innis, and she took pity on Janet, and was especially kind to her on that account. When Sarah got an opportunity she slipped her a nice bit of hot soda bread and butter, or something equally tasty. To Janet these "pieces" tasted delicious, for they never got any variety, nothing but thick loaf bread for breakfast and tea the year round—thick bread and thin butter, but such butter Janet said, it sometimes tasted like rotten fish and they had to scrape it off.

We laughed over the story of Janet and the porridge.

One night Sarah called Janet out of the schoolroom, and put into her hands in the dim hall a soup plate filled with porridge. "Take it up to your room, Miss Janet, and eat it there, and you can slip me the plate again," she said. Scarcely had Janet got to the door of her room, which was up two stories, when the prayer bell rang, and she dared not wait to eat it. Her trunk was at the foot of her bed, and she just lifted the lid of it and set it carefully in on top of her clothes, and closing the lid she ran downstairs again. Now it just happened that Lottie Magee was reading a lovely book of Janet's, that she kept in her trunk, called "The Wide Wide World," and Janet told her to take it at any time and leave it back in her trunk when she had finished with it. Lottie had a bit of candle of her own, and

intended to read some of it that night after she was in bed. She slept in a room below Janet's, and when the prayer-bell rang thought she would have time to run up and get the book and secrete it in her own room on the way down. She just missed Janet on the stairs as she went up, and groping her way into Janet's room and going over to where she knew Janet's trunk was, she lifted the lid and put her hand in to feel for the book. Next minute she had to give a scream, for her hand went down into something hot and slimy, and she let the lid fall with a slam and rushed away for her life. She wiped her hand in the dark with her handkerchief as she ran downstairs and burst into the schoolroom.

The girls were taking their places round the table, and Miss Spark was just coming to conduct prayers. Lillie Love was really Janet's best friend, and she sat on one side of Janet at prayers and Lottie Magee on the other. Lottie slipped into her place beside Janet just as Miss Spark had seated herself at the head of the table, and was preparing to open the hymn-book.

Janet noticed that Lottie was very much excited, and wanted to say something to her. "Oh Janet," she whispered, "do you know there is something awful in your trunk. I put in my hand for 'The Wide, Wide World' and there was something hot lying in the trunk. I had to scream—would it be an animal do you think—maybe a rat?"

"Now young ladies no more talk there. We are about to begin. Hymn number three-hundred-and-sixty," came from the head of the table.

Janet managed to find the place, but she could not sing. When she tried her voice shook with laughter. How shall

I ever read my verse? she thought, for I can't stop, I wish I could. She tried not to think of it and think of something else, but when she glanced at Lottie and saw how solemn Lottie looked, she had to give way again. She could almost feel the shock Lottie got when her hand went into the hot slobbery stuff, and then how quickly Lottie must have taken it out again, and then at thought of all this she was afraid she would laugh outright, and stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth, and when her turn came to read she could not attempt it. The girls all stared at her. "Go on, Janet, please," said Miss Spark. Janet tried, but her voice shook, and she gave it up.

"You read the verse, Lottie," said Miss Spark, and then all the girls thought Janet was crying, and they stopped looking at her and were sorry for her.

Miss Spark thought it kinder to take no more notice of her. When prayers were ended she said: "Now, young ladies, undress and get to bed quickly, and remember that after Katherine removes the candles there is to be no more talking to-night."

Janet's laugh vanished when she got to her room and opened her trunk. Lottie, in her fright had knocked the plate of porridge upside down. It had spilled over her clothes, and even "The Wide, Wide World" that was the cause of the misfortune was soiled and sticky. There also lay her best nightgown, with its cutwork trimming soaked with porridge, and the flounces of her white petticoat had got a good dose of it too.

The other girls in the room gathered round the trunk and sympathized with her, and set to work to help her. They washed the soiled articles in their basins, and hung them before the open window to dry.

So busy were they that when Katherine came to take away the candles they had not begun to undress or even to do their hair, and Katherine was very cross when she saw them. "Why are you not in bed, young ladies. I'll have to tell Miss Spark on you," she snapped.

They all hated Katherine. She was always spying on them behind their backs, and telling tales on them to Miss Spark. They preferred good natured, fat old Sarah, who would often slip them a nice little tit-bit, and would never think of telling on them no matter what they did.

"Leave us the candle five minutes, Katherine," they begged, and they began hurriedly to undress; but Katherine was glad to do something disagreeable, and she marched off with it in triumph. It was rather fun after all going to bed in the dark, bumping up against each other, and taking each other's nightdresses, and nearly getting into the wrong beds in the end. The girls thought Lottie and the porridge was the best joke ever they had heard. They giggled and whispered, and even laughed so loud that Miss Tart, the governess, who slept in the next room, heard them and reported it to Miss Spark. The result was they were each asked separately at breakfast if they had spoken after Katherine had removed the candles, and all had to say they had. Their halfpennies disappeared through the hole of the missionary box, and they had to deny themselves a Paris bun for their merriment.

When Janet told Sarah about it she put her hands on her fat sides and laughed till she cried. "Mebbe I'll be able to slip you all some to-night in your room, for, poor things, you need it," she said, and she fulfilled her promise, and they had that night what they considered a real substantial feast.

CHAPTER XV.

IDA SAVES NOBLE FROM DROWNING.

The weather during those Christmas holidays did its best to "pleasure" us, as Biddy would have said. A fine frost set in and lasted. Doon Lough lay about a mile from the Manse, a picturesque lake with the ruins of an ancient castle beside it, and a "crannoge" or artificial island in its centre.

It was rarely that Droon Lough was frozen over, for it was a fairly large lake, and when this happened there was much rejoicing among the youth of the neighbourhood, Janet and Noble among them.

You will remember that one night last winter I saw a shooting star and wished for a pair of skates. I got my wish, but had to wait nearly a year for it. Lucy Crowe's uncle in Belfast sent her a beautiful new pair for a Christmas box, and to my unbounded delight she passed her old ones on to me.

This made me determined to learn to skate, and the first time Noble was putting them on I could hardly sit still on the bank to let him get them buckled.

When he had the straps all fastened he said: "There you are now, my lady, the next thing is to try and get up on your feet." He took my hand to help me to rise, and I struggled to get up, but my feet did not seem to belong to me at all, and I had no control over them. I nearly pulled him off his the way I clung to him.

Janet, who was skating beautifully, and could go backwards and do the "Dutch Roll," skated over to where we

were and took one of my arms, and Noble took the other. They got me on the ice, but it took all their strength to keep me up. I'm sure I nearly pulled the arms out of them, and at last, and no wonder, they said it tired them too much to help me any more, and they would just leave me to depend on myself.

So away they skated, leaving me standing alone looking after them with envy. I found that learning to skate was not by any means the easy affair I had fancied it was. Utterly helpless I felt, for it took me all my time to stand. As Janet was gliding away so swiftly and gracefully I called after her, "Janet, dear good Janet, do come back and hold me up for I am going to fall." The little boys and girls who were sliding around me laughed at this.

"Well," shouted back hardhearted Janet, "fall if you like, and get up again."

I knew I must try to do something, so I made up my mind to venture one foot out as a sort of trial. I did this, and the other one went too without my intending it should, and slap down I came on the broad of my back, while Janet and Noble and some of the other skaters stopped their skating to laugh, and the little boy and girl sliders cheered. Beth, who was running about on the ice, was indeed very concerned about me, and she ran to try and pull me up. But up was what I couldn't get. First, I got the length of my knees, and tried to get a foot under me to raise myself, and away it flew, and down I went again. Noble at last took pity on me, and came to me and tried to show me how to slide first one foot and then the other, and told me "not to be frightened, but let myself go." He said it was the easiest thing in the world to do if I would only do it.

Instead of that I thought it was the hardest thing that I had ever yet tried to do.

Noble stood opposite me, and told me to imitate what he did. He slid out one foot and I slid out one foot as he directed me to, but before I could slide out the other, as he told me to, away went the first I had slid out, and I lay at my length on the ice.

He helped me up again and said I would just have to go on that way till I learned, and to remember "Bruce and the spider." I called to mind the story, and I said to myself, surely I can do what a spider can do; I will "try, try, try again," and I determined not to be beaten, no matter how often I failed. Down on my back—up again, down on my knees—up again. I could not tell you the number of times this amusing performance was gone over—that is, amusing to the onlooker, and indeed I very often laughed at myself and my "squavers." I continued to fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up, and that was the length I had got when it was time to go home to tea. And it was then I discovered that I was sore all over. My knees were cut, and the skin off my elbow, I had also a lump on my forehead and my back ached. After tea Mamma got hot water, and bathed all these painful places tenderly and packed me off to bed.

As she tucked me up she said: "That is the only way to learn anything, Ida, and you will find that nothing worth knowing can be had without trouble and pain of either mind or body. And you have learned one lesson to-day—to depend on yourself."

Next morning I was stiff all over, and Mamma made me stay in bed till dinner time. But when Janet and Noble

were setting out again for Droon Lough I could not let them go without me, and thought maybe the frost will go away and I haven't learned to skate, and I said to myself, "I will learn if all the world laughs at me."

Noble put on my skates again, and he and Janet helped me off the bank and on to the ice. They held me up for a little, while I shuffled about, and then left me, and I did not ask them to stay, for I was overjoyed to find that I felt my feet much surer under me. Of course I fell time and again, but I could slide now a step or two before I fell, and when I did feel my feet going from under me I just let them go and went down as easily as I could, and I was seldom hurt at all. Noble and Janet and everyone said I was coming on all right, and the children did not laugh so much at my manœuvres. On the third day I found I was actually beginning to skate. How proud I was of myself! How perfectly lovely it was to feel yourself gliding over the ice, your body swaying with the delightful movement, and glowing with the exercise in the clear frosty air.

I seemed to get better at it every minute, and could go quicker and quicker. Oh!! it was the pleasantest sensation I had ever felt.

On the fourth day it was certainly thawing, and had thawed the night before. We hurried to the Lough immediately after breakfast that we might get as much skating as we could before the ice melted, for in all likelihood we wouldn't have as keen a frost that winter again. Mamma was very anxious at us setting out, and called after us on no account to go on the ice if there was the slightest danger. We assured her there couldn't possibly be any danger yet, the ice was so thick, and this was likely the last day we would have on it.

When we came to the Lough we saw that the ice was rather thin at the edges, and in some places giving way. Those who were already skating warned us that one part of the lake that they pointed out to us was dangerous, for they had been over it and had heard the ice cracking.

I could now skate as I thought splendidly, and was enjoying myself beyond anything, and never thinking of any danger, for we were all keeping away from the suspected quarter, but on looking round after a time I was frightened to see Noble skate near the part that was considered dangerous, and I thought "that is like Noble, he is afraid of nothing, and would venture anything, he is so daring." Other skaters had noticed it too, and were shouting at him to come back, and then to my horror I heard the ice give a great crack and saw it give a wide gape under Noble's weight, and the next awful sight was Noble in the water.

I watched him with fascinated eyes keep clutching with his hands at the jagged edges of the ice around the hole where he was, and frightened to see it was giving way with him too. Such a hub-bub as started then! Everybody was shouting to him what he should do, and two men on the bank ran to the near-by farmhouse for a ladder. But I knew that Noble could never keep himself up till they came back with it, for every time he seized a hold of the ice it broke off, and the hole was getting wider and wider. What would we do! What would we do!

And for the first time in my life I prayed earnestly. Oh! how I prayed. I lifted up my heart to God and cried out loud: "Oh! God, save Noble! Oh! God, save Noble!" Never before I knew had I prayed like this. My whole heart

and being were in the simple words. And I knew the prayer ascended to the Throne on high, for at that moment something seemed to say to me, "take off your cloak and throw it to him."

I put up both hands to do so, but they trembled so much that I could not unfasten it. With all the strength of my body I tore it open at the neck. It was a wide cloak, and I slid over on the ice as near as I dared to where Noble was, and when I saw I could not venture further I lay down on the ice and threw one end of my wide cloak over to Noble, and shouted to him to catch it while I held the other.

The ice was cracking around me, but I tried not to hear it, but kept on praying: "Oh! God, save Noble! Oh! God, save Noble." It seemed to me as if I were lying hours there, but I could see that I was keeping Noble's head above the terrible black water that was all round him. I knew I could do it no longer, that I would soon be in it myself, for it was giving way with me, and just as I felt that I would be drowned, too, the men arrived with the ladder and pushed it cautiously along to where Noble and I were. He was able to clamber up with its help, and then I grasped it and we were both dragged to safety.

Of what happened after that I have no memory at all. The first thing I knew was I found myself lying on the bank and shouting wildly, "Where is Noble?" Where is Noble?" and I tried to get up to find him.

There were a lot of people round me, and someone said, "He's been taken home and word sent to put hot jars in his bed, and all the blankets on top of him."

"Is he drowned?" I asked.

"No, he's all right, but he would have been only for you," they said.

I seemed to lose my senses again, but not quite, for I heard them say I was the pluckiest little girl ever they saw; and they kept praising me, but I didn't care what they said, for why should I get any praise for trying to save my dear brother Noble's life? What would home be without Noble? Wasn't he the life and soul of the Manse, and of all our fun? What would we do if there was no Noble to play pranks on everyone, especially Sally, who gave him a piece of her mind pretty often in abusive terms, or, as she would have said, "tongued him," and who thought there wasn't another boy like him in the world. Although out of his high spirits he teased us all, yet it was Noble who would be the one to do anything for you—everybody could count on Noble's help given with "a heart and a half," and if he got anything he shared it with the whole house. To look at his face alone would make anyone happy. And there was one thing sure, he wasn't lazy. If it wasn't work with Noble it was fun. No, we couldn't do without Noble!

Although they kept telling me Noble was nothing the worse, and I believed it, yet I cried the whole way home, and couldn't stop no matter how hard I tried. Mamma ran out to the gate to meet me, and threw her arms round me and held me tight, but couldn't speak for a minute, for she was crying too. Then she called me her brave, darling little girl, and kissed me over and over again. And Papa, too, when he came home late that evening and was told all about the accident, said he was proud of me. It seemed strange to me to be made so much of for trying to save my brother's life. If I had helped to do that it was enough for me that I knew I had been guided to do it.

When Noble had had a good sleep I went up to see him, and Sally, with very red eyes, was sitting beside him—her work could wait. There was the dear, rougish face on the pillow. "Well you are a plucky one, Ida, and no mistake," he said. "We'll have to get you a medal. How did you think of it?" But that was my own secret.

At "worship" that night Papa thanked God for his great mercies vouchsafed to us that day, and prayed that the young life so dear to us that had been spared and given back to us might be devoted to God's service, and I'm sure Sally, on the cold kitchen tiles, offered her thanksgiving too from an overflowing heart.

That night, on going to my room, as Janet had not yet come up, I sat a long time on my bed thinking over and over again of what had happened. I then went down on my knees to say my prayers, and realized for the first time what "Our Father which art in Heaven" really meant. I felt Him at that moment quite near, and knew that He was near me at all times and in all places, as I had discovered that very day. I just asked Him in simple childish language to forgive my sins, and to help me to love and serve Him to my life's end.

I was only twelve when I gave God my young heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BADGER'S RAID ON BIDDY'S HEN-HOUSE.

Not far from the Manse there was a wild waste piece of hilly ground with here and there large holes in it. This was called the Badger's Hill, and it was commonly believed that Badgers made their homes here, making these holes to go in and out by, and burrowing deep into the hill, and that it was in these burrows that the badgers lived and reared families of young badgers. Although the place was some distance from the road from where we could see some of these holes, we always thought it wiser when we came within sight of them to keep running till we had left the Badger's Hill far behind.

Yet very few people could ever tell us that they had seen a badger or what it was like, for they never left their burrows through the day. We had seen pictures of them and knew they were ugly, clumsy looking creatures, something like a pig and something like a bear, with short legs and short bushy tail, and bristly fur of a dark grey colour. We never wanted to meet one, although it would not have done us any harm, and would have run away for fear of us.

One day, rushing as usual, into Paddy's and Biddy's, we missed Paddy leaning over the half-door, nor was he in the kitchen. Biddy herself was in her accustomed place, sitting on the stool before the fire that had nearly gone out. We wondered she never looked round when she came in. At first we were frightened, for she had her apron over her head and was crying and chanting between her sobs a sort

of lament. She was saying over and over again: "Och, me darlin' wee flock of chickens, me sweet wee birds an' me gran' layin' pullets. There's none of you left me now, what'll I do at all, at all. An' such a sore cruel death for ye! Och me heart's just broke in two."

"What has happened to your hens and chickens, Biddy?" I asked.

"They're gone, they're all gone, an' there's few of me fine flocks left now."

"Did anyone steal them from you, Biddy?"

"You might well say that, he did steal them indeed, indeed, he did steal them."

"Who stole them, Biddy?"

"Why that oul' murderin', thievin', villain that lives on the hill."

"Who, Biddy?"

"The oul' badger! nobody but hisself would have done it. Him, the oul' rascal and thief of the world, he stole them, an' killed them, an' ate them, an' sucked their blood."

"Did he eat them every one on you, Biddy?"

"Well, some of them he killed and didn't ate, an' some of them he ate, and more of them he left with the life hardly in them, they were that scarred out of their wits. Them that he left I wouldn't wonder mightn't lay an egg these six months after the fright they got an' the bloody battle them poor wee craythers was in last night."

"When did he do it, Biddy?"

Biddy took the apron off her head and wiped her eyes with a corner of it, and in a few minutes she was able to relate the sorrowful story.

"Last night, it might have been twelve o'clock, or it might have been one, or it might have been two, I couldn't rightly tell for Paddy an' me never needs a clock and hasn't one, we wouldn't have time to study a clock, but it was sometime through the night anyway. I was awoke out of me soun' sleep with a semendible uproar, but Paddy's a bit hard o' hearin' an' he just snored on. I shook him hard to waken him an' I shouted in his hearin' ear, 'Paddy, Paddy, listen to me, there's something past the common wrong outby, for the hens is screechin' like paycocks, but you're deef, and doesn't hear it.' But Paddy was that warm and happy in his bed that he didn't want to leave it. 'The hens is just dreamin' in their sleep, that's what they are,' says he, 'an' so are you too. Mebbe one of them aged fowl has fell off the roost, an' can't find her way on it again in the dark. It'll not be long till mornin' anyway,' an' with that over he turns on his other side an' was soon snorin' again. I was afeard to go out me lone in the clouds of the night for fear somebody might kidnap me, but at the schreech o' day I up an' out, for I was onaisy in me mind an' never slep' another wink. May I never again in this world see the sight these two eyes fell on! The whole henhouse wrecked and pulled to pieces, an' feathers, feathers, everywhere, that's all one could see at first, you would think all the fowl in the town-lan' had been plucked in it, an' then I seen, och oh! most of me grand hens lyin' dead, and when I was lookin' for me early wee flock of chickens, them an' their Mother wasn't to be found at all, at all. An' the whole place was strewn like a battle-field with the dead an' dyin' when the fightin's over an' done. Och, me darlin' wee innocent chickens just murdered in coul' blood." Biddy

rocked herself backwards and forwards on her stool and started crying bitterly again.

"Where's Paddy now?"

"Oh! the dear knows where he is! Out with the gun he is lookin' for the foxy oul' badger to shoot him, but he might as well look for goold on the gooseberry bushes, for they're that knowin' that they never come out of them oul' holes they build till they get dacent people sleepin' soun' in their beds, an' then they begin their wickedness, the biggest vagabones in the world, that's what they are!"

We could not tell poor Biddy how sorry we were for her and we didn't know what to say or do to comfort her. Hens and ducks formed almost her entire earthly possessions, and the loss was terrible indeed in her eyes. Beth cried for her.

It was which of us could run home first to tell the astonishing news. So out of breath where we when we got into the parlour that Papa and Mamma could not gather what had happened. "The badger . . . Biddy's hens . . . stolen . . . killed. Her early flock of chickens all gone," we gasped. We described the state Biddy was in, crying and moaning and saying her heart would break in pieces.

"Where's Paddy?" asked Papa.

"He's away with the gun," said Beth, "to shoot the badger."

Papa laughed at that. "The badger wouldn't have much trouble," he said, "getting into Paddy's ramshackle old henhouse. If he had kept it mended it would have paid him better than out with a gun in broad daylight searching for a badger. The badger is now having a good sleep after

his feast of last night. He's in his safe hole long ago, where nobody could get at him."

Beth had gone upstairs. She now came down and said to me, "Come back with me, Ida, to Biddy's. I have something I want to give her." In her hand was the threepenny bit that she had taken out of the box in her bedroom where she kept it, and although it was all she possessed in the world she was going to part with it."

Biddy was still swaying herself about and lamenting to herself when Beth went over to her and put her little hand in hers. "This is a present for you Biddy," she said, "and please don't cry any more."

"The Lord love you, dear Miss Beth. It's you an' yours that has the warm heart an' the kind deed for them that's in trouble," and she kissed the generous little hand. Biddy was too well bred to hurt Beth's feelings by refusing to accept the little coin. And this loving action on Beth's part did Biddy good. She wiped her face with her apron, got up and said she would make herself a cup of tea.

Just then Paddy came in with his gun.

"Well," said Biddy, "did you find him?"

"No, I did not. No appearance of him could I see anywhere though I tramped back and forth over the hill till me legs ached."

Paddy looked very tired indeed, and sadder than we had ever seen him before.

"Put by the gun," said Biddy, "an' sit down, an' rest yourself an' take your tay, for thank God we still have a cup o' tay an' a roof over our heads."

"Aye, thank God," echoed Paddy, "an' it would have

been worse if it had been something that had happened to you or me. We'll over it with God's help."

Mamma and Papa came in. Mamma had a basket with a pot of jam and some cold ham and set them down on the table for their tea. She told them how sorry she and Papa were for them and said she would not sit down then but would leave them to take their tea. "Come down in the morning, Biddy," she said, "an get a setting of our eggs, and I have a 'clocking' hen I can give you, and in three weeks you'll have a nice little flock again."

Papa said he had some boards lying, and Noble would bring them up and help Paddy to repair the henhouse, for Noble was a good carpenter. And we left them not a little comforted.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RIDE ON THE FAIRY HORSE.

We called nearly every day that week in Paddy and Biddy's to show them our sympathy and cheer them up. Noble had patched up their henhouse and it was a great deal more secure now than it had been for many a long day. Biddy had the hen "set" on the eggs Mamma gave her in a warm corner of the kitchen and life now looked to them just as agreeable as before.

One Saturday morning when we went up we actually found Paddy with a ladder against the house and he on the roof. He called down to us that he was "doin' a stroke of work that wasn't aisy," but that he had got the hole "filled in bravely and it ought to houl' till the next big wind came anyway." He came down the ladder—it wasn't a great distance to Paddy's roof—and stood looking at it. Biddy came out to have a look at it too. "Mebbe it'll keep in now an' mebbe it'll not, but we'll know when the rain comes anyway," she said.

"Well," said Paddy, "if it doesn't it can't be helped. I lost my whole mornin' at it anyway an' there's that lether has to be kedged home again that I borrowed from Felix Tumulty, but mebbe he mightn't wont it for a day or two yet. It can stan' till afther I get my dinner anyway."

We all went into the house. Paddy came in last, wiping his brow with what remained of the sleeve of his coat, and reclined on the heap of "turf" in the corner after his hard job. Biddy put on the potatoes for dinner in a three-legged

pot, hung it on the 'crane' over the open fire, and sat down on her stool to wait till they were boiled.

"The times are past an' gone when the 'wee people' might have done the like of that for you, but now a body has to do every mortial thing for themselves," said Paddy.

"Aye," agreed Biddy, "people gets no rest at all now, but you get more nor me for I'm never done trailin' afther them fowl, the're that hard to attend, an' satisfy them is what you couldn't do, for them hens' heads is filled with nothin' but aitin."

"If you had to sthrive with thon contrairy animal of a goat now," said Paddy,"you might well talk. That goat, believe me or not as you like, would wear the heart out of a strong man. Many's the time, no matter how hard I hammer the tether stake down with a big stone, up she pulls it again no sooner nor me back's turned, an' away she goes with herself dandherin' here, an' stravagin' there, an' keeps me trudgin' hard lookin' for her, an' mebbe at long last finds her in some foreign shough atin' somebody's hedge that she never clapped eyes on afore. That goat has a wandherin' on her that if she could cross the sea to Americky or Australia she would be there before now. She minds me of a man I once hear' tell of called 'The Wanderin' Jew.' He's mebbe dead an' gone now. You may say it's many's the pilgrimage that contrairy baste gives me for my sins."

"You might talk," said Biddy, "if you had to milk the playboy, an' her dunchin' me an' dunchin' me to try to tummle me an' the sup of milk over. An' as for the kickin's of her! She would just mind you of Andy Clegg's oul' mare that was afflicted with the click-ups. Many's the dunch you may say she gives me for my sins, and if you ever come

across me straitched an' speechless you'll know it was thon oul' tinker of a goat what done it."

"Och well," Paddy wound up the debate on the goat, "afther all's said an' done we'd be a dale worse wantin' her, for I pity them from me heart that hasn't a sup of goat's milk to put in their tay, it improves it out of all knowin'."

Beth's face was grave while Paddy and Biddy were reciting their trials. She was genuinely shocked at the wickedness of the goat, and sorry for the way she imposed on her master and mistress. Beth wanted them to try and forget the abandoned animal and to talk of something more cheerful.

"Do you remember any new stories about the fairies, Paddy?"

Paddy appeared to be deep in thought for some minutes.

"Did I ever tell you that one about my gran'father gettin' the great ride on a fairy horse?"

He had—times without number—but sometimes it was his father's uncle that had the wonderful ride, and sometimes it was a cousin of his grandfather's. But no matter, these details were unimportant; the fairy ride was one of our prime favourites.

"Well," began Paddy, "in them bygone days, that were betther than the ones that are goin' now, an' people got time to take their meat an' their good night's sleep and have a 'shamaugh' with the fairies, for the wee people were more intimate with the people roun' them than you would believe in these hard, stirrin' times, an' many's a one they asked to join them in their antics on moonlight nights roun' the fairy thorns an' among the yellow ragweeds in the fields.

'Deed I wish I could tell you all the adventures I heard of them in my youth, but I disremember the half of them, for me memory's near wore out strivin' with that mastherful goat.

"Anyways, me gran'father was great with the wee people, an' they had a likin' for him far an' above other people, for he always treated them with respect, and had a good word for them. But there was one thing he was always wantin' of them an' that was to give him a ride on a fairy horse, for he had heerd tell of such rides. An' at last they said they would do it, an' toul' him to be in a certain field on a certain night at a certain time, an' they would see what they could do to pleasure him in that way.

"The night come roun', an' instead of goin' to his bed, as many's a time he wished he had done afterwards, he slipped out of the house, leavin' the door on the latch, for he was expectin' to be back soon.

When he got the length of the trystin'-place, here wasn't there a great recourse of fairies, more nor ever he had seen in his life afore, an' the field was yellow from end to end with ragweeds. Sez the spokesman, sez he, 'Take your sate on that horse,' pointing to a big ragweed, but never a sign of a horse could me gran'father see at all, but down he sits on the ragweed, as they bid him, an' he was hardly on it, till didn't it turn into the grandest big white horse ever he seen in his livin' life. The wee people all laughed at the surprise he got at that, an' sez the fairy spokesman, sez he, 'Now, away you go, an' don't houl' in, but give him a free head, but mind I must put a spell on you, an' that is no matther what happens, never you say one word. If you do the spell will be broke.' An' with that

he gives the horse a cut roun' the legs with a wee fairy whip that he had undher his arm, an' the horse gave one lep that made me gran'father believe it was goin' to take him up in the direction of the moon. But it kep' on the groun' or near to it anyway for its feet were mostly in the air, an' away it galloped faster than any race horse ever he had seen, for it took the hedges and ditches that was in its way as if they were cabbages, an' on it went in a straight course no matter what was in its road till at last it come to the River Bann, an' it at its widest, mebbe as far as frim this till half-way down the loanin across it. He strove to turn the animal when he seen the great splash of water in the dark lyin' fornenst them but before you could say 'Jack Robinson' hadn't the big baste cleared it at one bound an' wasn't my brave man an' his fairy horse on the other side in a different county from their own altogether. With the surprisin' lep he got he forgot the warnin' words of the fairy an' afore he knowed what he was doin' he shouted 'bravo.' That one word broke the spell an' the next thing he knowed wasn't he sittin' on a yellow ragweed an' him on the far side of the river an' no sign of the white horse at all, at all. That was you may say a quondary to find hisself in an' more nor he had bargained for at the start. Here he was sittin' on a ragweed on the far side of the Bann River mebbe hundreds of miles from his own home for all he knowed. In the end he never could rightly tell how he got home. First he had to sweem the River Bann at its widest an' then tramp mile after mile through the pitch dark night across a sthrange counthry where he had never set foot afore, an' it teemin' rain the whole time—but that didn't matther for he couldn't be wetter nor he was afther sweemin' the Bann—an' the cocks was crowin' in the mornin' afore he come in sight of

his own pratie field an' that was the first time he knowed where he was. As was to be expected he took a fever out of that night's work an' it was when he was wandherin' in his mind that he let out the whole affair of the fairy ride."

Said Biddy: "It's the quare pity now that he didn't know to turn his coat, an' that would have saved him all the bother. Me own gran'father was a knowledgeable man about everything, 'specially about the wee people, an' was led asthray himself by them more nor once. He mebbe would be comin' home from market or fair of a dark night—an' mebbe have got a wee dhrop of poteen—an' all of a sudden he would find himself on some sthrange road he didn't know at all. He then knowed it was just a fairy trick an' that the wee people had beguiled him for their own divarshun. But *he* was the one knowed what to do. He would just whip off his coat an' turn it, an' put it on again, an' that very minute, as sure as you're sittin' there wasn't his own road straight afore him as plain as the nose on his face. I often listened to him give this advice: 'If you find you don't know where you are *just turn your coat,*" and many's the one was thankful to him for it afterwards."

We left, glad to see Paddy and Biddy in their usual happy frame of mind again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MINISTER WHO LOVED GOD'S CREATURES.

Easter was early that year and Janet was home again for the holidays, taller and looking more imposing than ever in our eyes. She had a way of pretending to know ever so much more than we did and she called Hugh and Beth "kids." The boys called her "Miss Peacock," and asked if she had left her tail behind at school. But Janet deserved her title. She was proud in the right way, too proud ever to do or say a mean thing, and I used to think "if I do what Janet does it is sure to be right."

We had a very much loved friend, a Minister—who lived in the nearest Manse to us about two miles away, with whom we loved to spend an evening. A visit to him was different from a visit to any other place, and his house was unlike anybody else's house, it being a sanctuary for birds and animals.

We used to think him an old man, but now I know he wasn't old at all, nor would he ever be old, because he took such an interest and pleasure in all God's work that he was never for a moment bored or dull, nor was anyone who was in his company. He loved to watch the habits of birds and animals and insects, and usually carried a pair of field glasses in order to see more distinctly at a distance the little creatures in woods and trees and hedges that were too timid to let a human being come close to them. He often said that it did not speak very well for mankind that these, our little fellow creatures living on the same world with man, and having like joys and sorrows, and subject to sickness and death with him should stand so much in dread

of him. The birds seemed to know they could trust Mr. Moran and would let him come quite close to them without appearing at all afraid.

Papa told us he was like a very good man who lived hundreds of years ago and was called Saint Francis of Assisi, who called the birds his brothers and sisters and used to preach to them, and that the birds were not the least bit afraid of him but would light on his shoulders and eat from his hand.

Mr. Moran was unmarried and lived alone except for his dear animals who he said were the best of all companions for they didn't weary you talking. He had an old housekeeper called Peggy who was so deaf that she could not hear the cockatoo which lived in the sitting-room window screeching at her "Purty Peggy, purty Peggy." (A nephew of Mr. Moran had taught him to say many naughty things.) We thought Peggy cross, and because she had a squint we never knew which of us she was looking at. Purty Peggy wore an old fashioned poke bonnet in the house and looked just our idea of a witch, and Beth stood in great awe of her, but Mr. Moran liked her because she was good to all the animals he gathered round him.

You usually could count four dogs scampering round Mr. Moran when he was busy in his garden, and very often they were busy too, trying to make themselves useful by digging up what he had put in the ground carefully. I have heard him say that sometimes he had to go over the operation of putting the same plant in the ground three times.

On setting out to visit the members of his congregation he would command the dogs to stay at home. They knew what he meant and would slink back and look sadly and

reproachfully at him so that he used to say he had to harden his heart in order not to repeal the order. One of them, however, Buster, while pretending to obey could outwit him. When Buster saw the Minister putting on his hat and taking his stick he would disappear and hide some place where he could watch what way his master was going, and as Mr. Moran walked along the road, Buster slunk along behind the hedge till they were so long a way from home that he couldn't be sent back; and then Buster would come forward and grovel at his feet as if apologising. The Minister would say: "Bad Buster, bad dog," and Buster would prance round him pretending his master was praising instead of scolding him. Buster chased everything real and imaginary—except the hens—for he had got a lesson when he was a youngster about that sport that he never forgot. The first hen he chased who was foolish enough to run, he had got down at the side of the road and was plucking her feathers out when his Master rushed up. The Minister always carried a stick but it was seldom he used it. That day he used it with such good effect that ever after when they passed a hen with a flock of chickens Buster would look at the other side of the road pretending he saw something far more interesting there.

You were always sure of seeing kittens, too, at Mr. Moran's, frisking about and playing with their mother's tail—a game she forbade—and when she became cross and twitched it away they thought that greater fun than ever.

Mr. Moran said he had one objection to cats—that they killed the birds. In frosty weather he always saw that the birds not only had enough to eat, but also water to drink, for when every puddle was frozen over they could not get a drink, and many of them died of thirst. There was

always a feast of suet or dripping spread on his high table in the garden during frost—food the birds loved. All winter a cocoanut hung from the branches of one of his trees and the dear little blue-tits repaid him for his trouble by showing him their love for its delicious kernel. Many and many a bird's life had Mr. Moran saved during a hard frost.

On that sunny and windy April afternoon we all started in high spirits and knew Mr. Moran would meet us half-way. Although we had not caught sight of him yet we knew he was coming, for round a corner came Buster and Bounce and Spot as if they were running to catch a train and were afraid they'd be late. On seeing us they expressed the wildest pleasure; we were really, they said, the very people they wanted to see, and Buster nearly knocked Beth down in his transport. In the middle of their blandishments they became aware of something in the shough that required their investigation. Buster detected it, and Bounce and Spot smelt it and were not certain what they ought to do about it, for it was a very queer thing that walked in long jumps and they were a little afraid of it. Mr. Moran turned the corner and hastened over to see that they were not doing anything bloodthirsty, and found it was a frog that was trying to hop out of the way. He lifted it gently and put it through a hole in the hedge and called them off, and then he had time to shake hands with us. Old Dandy stayed close to his Master, and if the frog had jumped before his nose he would hardly have seen it, for his eyes were dim and his ears deaf and smell was all that remained to him of his one-time acute senses. He, too, in his day when he was a gay young fellow had chased everything that was foolish enough to run, but thirteen

years are, alas! the "three-score-and-ten" of a dog, and he was content just to be able to walk soberly at his Master's heels.

Our friends all turned with us and we began to look for birds' nests in the hedges and it was for who would find the first one. We all could tell it would be Noble. He knew more about birds than any of us and could distinguish when flying and could tell by any nest what bird had built it, and if you showed him an egg, he could say at once what bird had laid it. As he went along the roads or across the fields he listened to their songs and knew each bird by its song.

Suddenly Noble gave a sort of yell and shouted "Look Mr. Moran, look—there it is . . . here . . . there . . . look behind you," he kept pointing every way. We all tried to find what it was that was exciting him and looked everywhere but could see nothing. It was not long till Mr. Moran discovered what it was. "A swallow! . . . . the first . . . you beat me this time Noble." Noble looked as proud as Punch. He had seen the first swallow and for years had kept a record of the date. It was beautiful to watch its gracefulness in the air, now soaring high, now dipping low like a swimmer diving into the sea. It had got safely back again from the far, far away country where it wintered, to the dear old homeland where it wanted to lay its eggs and bring up its family. Mr. Moran said it was one of the most marvellous things in the world how the swallows could find their way to those distant countries and then return, for he believed that the swallows came back to the very same places year by year. He said it was estimated that they flew three hundred miles a day.

When we got Mr. Moran started on birds he could not

stop, and he told us of birds that lived in foreign countries and had the most gorgeous plumage. "They are magnificent," he said, "to the eye, but something else is wanting—they cannot sing, they are just beautiful to look at and that is all. I wouldn't exchange our homely little birds for them and would miss the song of the blackbird, the lark or the thrush." He also described to us most amusing birds called penguins who live in the Southern seas and strut about like human beings whom they resemble in many things.

Noble kept peering into the hedges and soon discovered a nest. It was a hedge sparrow's and five little blue eggs lay in it. He lifted out an egg for us to see, and it felt warm for the Mother bird had just flown off, alarmed when she saw Noble's face so near her. She need not have been. Noble would not do her or her eggs any harm. He put it back, carefully closing the hedge around it lest some bad boys would find it and perhaps rob it. He had a fine collection of eggs of his own and had them in a box with a glass lid that Mr. Moynagh, who had a shop in Innis, had given him. This box was one of his treasures and he kept it in a drawer of his own room. When visitors came Noble brought the box down and thought they could have no better entertainment than looking at his eggs, and being told the name of the bird that had laid each egg.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NEST IN THE PULPIT.

The way did not seem long with Mr. Moran for company. We were at the Manse now and not a bit tired. The first thing we always did was to go and pay our respects to the cockatoo. He was a white bird with a crest of feathers on his head. Unfortunately he had got into a bad habit of pulling his feathers right out, and he had bare patches all over his body which were very unsightly. Mr. Moran said parrots often did this when they grew old and he thought it was some irritation of the skin made them do it, and Joe was very, very old, for parrots lived to be a great age. His name was "Joe," but he always called himself "poor old Joe."

We gathered round the cage and he put his head on one side and looked at us suspiciously.

"How are you to-day, Joe? How are you?" we greeted him.

"You're a bad lot. You're a bad lot. You're a bad lot," was Joe's response, and his voice rose higher with every repetition.

Joe's welcome always gave us unbounded pleasure. We loved to hear him shout this at us. Every visitor who inquired politely after his health always got this snub. Then he got very quiet and sulked and wouldn't talk to us any more, but while we were sitting at tea we could hear him say every now and then in an undertone to himself, "poor old Joe, poor old Joe, poor old Joe." He was pitying himself I suppose because we were there.

Peggy could not have been so "grumpy" as we thought, for she had baked nice scones for our tea, and we were ready for it. The treat that we expected and always got was honey—delicious honey from Mr. Moran's own bees. They fed on the heather of the mountains near, and this gave it a flavour that no other honey ever has.

When we had all taken an immense tea and devoured a plateful of Peggy's scones and left a large dish of honey empty, Mr. Moran said:

"Now I have something very peculiar to show you that I'm sure you never saw before. You may have seen it before but never in this place where it is."

"Where is it and we'll guess," said Beth.

"It's in the Meeting-house."

"Is it bats," said Hugh, for we had them in our own Meeting-house, and an odd time when one flew overhead during service it made a welcome distraction for us.

"No, it's not bats. You couldn't guess what it is, but I'll tell you more about it. It's actually in the pulpit!"

"Is it a mouse?" asked Beth, "for if it is I would be afraid of it."

"Afraid of a wee mouse!" said Mr. Moran, "that could do you no harm and is far more afraid of you. Why, Beth, I thought you had more sense than that. No, it's not a mouse; it is something I promise Beth she will not be afraid of."

We all jumped up and wanted to run to the Meeting-house that minute. The Meeting-house was just behind the Manse and Mr. Moran led the way out by the back door and across the yard. Here his pigeons lived in nice little houses high up against the barn wall, where cruel cats could not get near them, and with holes in them for the

pigeons to come in and out by. Mr. Moran said he had taught his own cats not to interfere with them. As we went into the yard one lighted on his shoulder, "Ah, Jenny," he said, "is that yourself, how are you, old girl?" Another lighted on his arm. "Ah, Tom," he said, "you're a very bold fellow, fly away now, it's time you were both in bed." Away they flew to their dove-cotes and looked out through the holes after him. They loved him too.

Mr. Moran unlocked the door of the Meeting-house and in we trooped. The closed up, fusty Church on an evening had a very different look and feel from a bright Sabbath morning when all these empty pews held young and old people, and the Minister was standing up in his high pulpit. It was just a wee bit "eerie" and Beth kept a tight hold of my hand. Mr. Moran went on up the aisle and we went in a string after him up to the old-fashioned pulpit that was climbed by a flight of stairs.

He opened the pulpit door, while we stood on the stairs, and said we were to come in one at a time, and he beckoned to Beth to come first. I had to unloose her hand and give her a push in, for she was not certain of what might be lurking in the pulpit, maybe a wild beast for all she knew!

Beth looked round and could see nothing to be afraid of. There was nothing but the stool the Minister stood on, for he was a little man, and then she clapped her hands. On the ledge underneath where the pulpit Bible lay, and where the Minister kept the number of the Psalms and the announcements he intended to make, was a bird's nest with four eggs in it! "It's a nest! it's a nest!" she called out to us.

"What kind of a nest is it?" asked Mr. Moran.

"A blackbird's," said Beth, to everyone's amusement.

"Now, you next Hugh, and tell us what it is."

Hugh looked over the pulpit door. "A robin's, of course," he said, the moment he saw the little speckled eggs.

It seemed to us beautiful and strange that a bird should build its nest in a pulpit!

Mr. Moran said he had never heard of such a thing happening before, and he could not tell us the joy and gladness it gave him that the robin had done him such an honour. "Even when I'm preaching," he said, "she sits there quite fearlessly on her nest and looks at me with complete trust in her bright eyes as much as to say 'I am listening to you, for I am one of God's children, too.' Now what psalm does that remind you of?" We all knew that.

"Behold the sparrow findeth out a place wherein to rest,
The swallow also for herself provided hath a nest,
E'en Thine own altars where she safe her young ones
forth may bring."

Alas and alas! to the bitter sorrow of the Minister the confiding little robin was not permitted "her young ones forth to bring" in God's house. The nest was robbed. Some boys in the neighbourhood, who must have heard about it, got by some means into the Meeting-house and carried nest and eggs away.

When we heard this afterwards our hearts ached for the little bird. Of course Beth cried, and I could have cried too.

We could picture to ourselves the daring little creature going out by the window when she felt hungry to try and find something to eat, or to take a short fly to herself to relieve the tiredness of sitting still all day long and all

night. She would think to herself, "I have chosen a very safe place for my nest, and I need not be anxious, only a few more days and my darling wee birdies will be with me in it. How I shall love them and take care of them and teach them to fly when the time comes. Oh! how happy I feel!"

And then we could see her coming back, and the terrible shock she must have got to find her home wrecked and her precious eggs, that were almost hatched out by her own warm little body, stolen. What sorrow must have filled her heart at the sight! It was enough to break it altogether. She would think of the time she had spent gathering the material here and there as she could find it, to build her house, and the pains she had taken to make it round and warm with her own little breast. She had chosen what she thought would be the safest place in the world, under the protection of that good, kind Minister who loved birds. And now she was homeless, and had lost the fine little birdies that she was looking forward to see so soon stretching up their little bare necks and opening their mouths wide when she returned with food for them. Poor lonely wee mother! She would have to go away and begin her work all over again.

But that happy evening we did not foresee this calamity as we came out of the Meeting-house and went towards a plantation of trees at a little distance, which was the home of squirrels and many other little living creatures. We never tired of watching the squirrels. They seemed all tail. How nimbly they would climb to the top of the highest trees! Mr. Moran told us that in Summer they laid up stores of nuts for the Winter, carrying them to their hiding places in their cheeks, which were like pouches.

It was getting dark when we got back to the Manse. Peggy had gone to see a neighbour, and was not home yet. The animals were clamouring for their supper. The cats miaoued and rubbed themselves coaxingly against their Master's legs. The dogs barked for their biscuits. But the old cockatoo beat them all, for he could say outright what he wanted. Above the mews and barks his shrill voice demanded "A bite of bread, a bite of bread, I could ate a bite of bread!"

We left Mr. Moran giving them their supper, and had to hurry home, for by this time it was dark, after having had a lovely evening with gentle Mr. Moran and his friends. We said good-bye to them all, and last to "poor old Joe," and as we went out of the door we heard him shouting after us "never come back, never come back, never come back."

CHAPTER XX.

THE OLD WHITE HORSE WITH THE LONG TAIL.

It was glorious Mid-summer. The old white Manse sat like an aged queen on a throne of flowers. She looked down on the scarlet geraniums and yellow calceolaris and blue lobelias that lay before her in rows along the beds that bordered the lawn; while old fashioned roses of nearly every hue perfumed the garden air. Mamma was the gardener. After her ceaseless day's work in the house we were accustomed to see her on her knees among the flowers till darkness compelled her to leave off. Then very often she would take us into the drawing room and give us a music lesson. How those hands did everything they did is now to me a mystery, for they reached out from her own household to minister to every other one that needed help.

We had each our own little gardens further back and were required to keep them in order, and on Saturday mornings I used to do mine over. Janet made a rockery, and on our walks we used to look out for large white stones to adorn it. She had brought in roots of ferns from moist places where they dwell and planted them on the bank along the perilous laurel walk where they found shade and looked refreshing on a hot day. I don't know whether the giant "Medusa" admired them or not; everyone else did. No, not everyone, for Felix Tumulty who cut the Manse hedges, was over anxious to please by clipping close the fern fronds and leaving a forlorn bank. Janet was furious, and scolded him, to Felix's surprise. He thought her silly to cherish in a

garden what were so common by the wayside and therefore could not be counted beautiful.

"Them Manse childher," he said afterwards to Sally, "hasn't what wit would lie on a sixpence! An' even his Reverence hisself bees lookin' in the bushes for birds' nests! An' man oh! Will you ever forget the night he lost his sleep to look at somethin' he took a notion was happenin' in the moon. I disremember the name he put on it."

* * *

That gloriously hot summer Philip M'Nulty's old white horse died, celebrated in life for his long tail. Not accustomed to see a long tail we wondered what it meant. On asking Philip he would look grave and say: "None of yez ever go near a long-tailed horse; mind I'm warnin' ye, they're dangerous. Horses with long tails bites."

We often met Philip on the roads with the old white horse jogging slowly between the shafts of the heavy cart, his eyes on the road under his feet, so that you would think to look at him he was walking in his sleep. On spying the old biter coming slowly but surely nearer us, we left the footpath and climbed the "ditch." The scramble to get up was exciting, the waiting enjoyably anxious, while at the actual passing of the old long-tailed horse on the road we clung to each other for safety. Philip would give a knowing shake of his head that meant we were wise to get out of danger.

One summer evening the long-tailed monster died, and that quite suddenly from old age. The news came to the Manse in this way.

We were just going to have "worship." Papa was sitting with his psalm-book open ready to begin, only that

we were one short. Beth was the absentee, and just then she rushed into the room, her mouth open, to say something that she felt must be said at once. She had just got the length of "Philip" when Papa gave out the number of the paraphrase that we were going to sing, and that stopped her from going any further. Taking the vacant seat between Mamma and Noble she managed to whisper into Noble's ear, "Philip M'Nulty's horse is dead." Noble felt he must spread the news, and into Hugh's ear that was next to him he sang it, and he sang it to "Martyrdom," the tune we were singing to the paraphrase.

"Philip M'Nulty's horse is dead,
Is dead, is dead, is dead."

All knew now but myself. When the "chapter" had been given out and Noble had read his verse and counted up the one that would come round to him next time—he wrote on a slip of paper with his pencil "P. M's. old white horse dead," and passed it on to me.

Papa and Mamma dare not be told of course till after the "Amen," a welcome word, usually to the ears of young Presbyterians. Beth informed them immediately, "He just dropped down dead in a corner of the field and he's lying there," she added. "Paddy told me he saw him."

Now everybody knows it is always a hard thing to go to bed, but on a Summer evening it is simply heart-breaking We were supposed to go immediately after "worship"—all except Noble, who was permitted to sit up an hour longer—but that evening we thought it would be no harm to slip out for a little fresh air before going upstairs. Who could undress and lie down in broad daylight while a lovely dead

horse was lying three fields away? Only Papa and Mamma and Sally, who were all as old as the hills, could do such a thing."

Sally did not come into prayers, but knelt on the cold kitchen tiles counting her beads, and she was still on her knees when we made a dash for the back door. As we passed her she shouted, "Away with you to your beds, ye rascals ye, the back gate's barred for the night." For nothing could shake Sally in her belief that the barring of the back gate bound you to go to bed.

There were other ways of getting into the loanin than walking out of the back gate. You simply crossed the yard, went by a back path into the potato field and squeezed through a gap in the hedge, and in less time than it takes me to tell, we were looking down at the ogre in his last sleep.

Beth arrived last, panting. She kept her distance well, for the dead old biter lying so still there with his long legs and his famous tail stretched out looked twice the size he did between the shafts of Philip's cart, and for all you knew, thought Beth, the cunning old beast was shamming, and at any moment might spring to his feet, switch his long tail, and make one jump at you. Of course that was what he had always intended to do only for Philip's whip.

However, the dead monster lay still, day after day, under June's blue skies and clear warm nights, while the children of the neighbourhood paid their respects to him daily. Children even from a distance came to view the lying in state. Hardly were visitors seated at the Manse till they got an urgent invitation to come and see the old dead horse. Most of them declined, and some, to please us,

came. But they usually stopped at the gate of the field, for the weather was warm and they fancied they smelt him, and they said that was enough.

When the old hero had lain for about three weeks, it happened that an English gentleman came to give a Temperance Lecture in Innis schoolhouse and to stay the night at the Manse. He was a pale, thin, grave-looking gentleman and we didn't really long for his company, but we did not wish him to miss the sight of a lifetime—a horse that had lain dead in a corner of a field for three weeks under Summer skies. No horse had ever died before, so far as we knew.

The Lecturer arrived safely, and Sally ambushed Hugh and Beth and scrubbed their hands and faces and we were all marched into the drawing-room and introduced. Beth looking so sweet and kind in her clean pinafore with her dark curls held back from her lovely forehead by a round comb, looked up with those big innocent eyes at our lecturer as he took her hand. "Won't you come and see Philip M'Nulty's horse? He's lying dead in the field this long time."

"No, Beth," said Mamma, "Mr. Fadley wouldn't care for that at all. He's tired after his journey. Show him your new spelling book like a good little girl."

Beth was disappointed, but she was always obedient, so she went in search of her spelling book, amazed that anyone could prefer the sight of a spelling book to that of a dead horse.

When she came back with it our visitor was putting Noble and Hugh and myself through an old test in arithmetic:—a herring and a half for three halfpence, how many for elevenpence? Noble thought this problem beneath his

knowledge and remained silent. Hugh answered eagerly, "eleven," and Beth was proud of him, but then Hugh was nine now and maybe when she was that age; she thought, she could solve difficult problems too.

To her astonishment Hugh became cleverer still, for he turned on his examiner.

"Say correctly after me, 'Slieve Gallion.' "

"Slieve Gallion," said the English gentleman as well as he could.

"Slieve Gullion."

"Slieve Gullion."

"You're wrong."

The English gentleman said that could not be so.

Beth was sorry for him and whispered in his ear, 'Say you're wrong after Hugh says you're wrong and you'll be right." And so at the second trial he was able to do it correctly. To my surprise the lecturer then turned on me and wanted to know the date of the Norman Conquest.

Wasn't I proud to be able to answer ten sixty-six and I saw how well Beth was pleased. Noble and Hugh slipped out of the room and I wondered dare I do that too, for you never knew what questions these strange lecturers would ask, maybe the capital of some heathen country at the other side of the world, or how many wives a certain King of England had—but I knew that one.

These English lecturers were too full of curiosity, and indeed they didn't know much themselves. Even Papa tried them with our nice easy names of places, Strughenaugher, Mullaghadonaghy, Ballyslagluttery, and as for "The Moyntiaghs," our big Ulster bog, not one of them could say it at all.

We all had to go to the lecture in the schoolhouse.

The place was so hot that we were just melting and could not listen or sit at peace at all. At any rate we had all signed the pledge long ago, even Beth in her big round handwriting—Bethiah Whiteside—for she always liked to sign her full name even after her exercises.

The lecturer came back with us after the meeting. We children, when we came near the Manse, took to our heels and away up the back loanin instead of coming into the house, and Mamma explained to the lecturer that we were going to have a peep at the dead horse.

The Englishman left early next morning. At breakfast he told Mamma he smelt the horse and had kept his window shut for the first time in his life.

But for ourselves, never did we allow a day to pass without going to see our old enemy, and when he turned into a skeleton that indeed was the greatest treat of all. What became of his bones I don't remember. Neither dead nor alive did he harm anyone, but had undergone a long lifetime of hard work. Perhaps he was happier lying there so still in the corner of the field than ever he had been before, since as a young colt he had kicked up his heels in that same field for the sheer joy of being alive.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BLACKBERRYING.

Autumn came, and although the days were sometimes as hot as summer yet the mornings and evenings were nippy and cold. It was getting very hard to get out of our warm beds in the morning. Beth and I had a plan that made it ever so much easier.

When we were both wide awake and knew it was time to get up, we started together to count a hundred, and when the hundred was reached it was for who could touch the floor first with their feet. And next for who would be dressed first. The water in the jug on the washstand was getting colder every morning, but we had our reward, for on splashing it over our faces and neck and shoulders we glowed with heat. We dare not neglect this duty, for sometimes Mamma examined necks and ears and if they didn't meet with her approval we were sent back in disgrace to our room to scrub them. I must say that this humiliation fell oftener to the lot of the boys than to us, and it was my duty to help to wash and dress Beth, who now slept with me while Janet was away. When Beth and I were dressed we played for who would be downstairs first, and because we had given ourselves so much exercise since we got out of bed by the time we were in the parlour and seating ourselves for breakfast we had forgotten it was cold at all.

The blackberries were now ripe, and at that time Miss Lark always gave a "blackberry picnic." So on a beautiful day in September, when the trees were turning all sorts of shades from gold to red, we had our annual picnic. Miss

Lark dismissed us early that day, all to meet at the cross-roads with our baskets at three o'clock. Each one was required to bring a cup in her basket, and Lucy Crowe, whose father was a farmer and had several cows, said she'd bring plenty of milk for the tea.

Most of us had been at the cross-roads a good while before three o'clock and were watching for Miss Lark, and when Miss Lark and Fido, who followed her everywhere, arrived punctually at three, Jenny Dolan had not turned up. That was Jenny all over. She never could be in time for anything, and was oftener late for school than anyone else. Miss Lark had lectured her times without end and tried to cure her of this bad habit. She said there was nothing gave more annoyance and sometimes did positive harm to people than a want of punctuality, and that it was very bad manners indeed to keep anyone waiting for us. How dear Miss Lark's good precepts come back to me through these long years that she has been in heaven.

"Here's Jenny now," everybody said, as our sharp eyes saw a little figure away far in the distance, running.

Miss Lark only smiled and shook her head as much as to say that it was useless talking to Jenny, but she would not scold on a picnic day unless for something very wrong indeed, and Jenny looked very repentant when she came up to us, all out of breath.

We walked nearly a mile to a wild desolate looking place where were the ruins of an old house, over these low ruins the brambles had spread and they grew luxuriantly around the fields that were beside it. All started with great eagerness to gather—we always began any job well—some of us were steady gatherers and others not—the steady

ones stayed in the same place until they had picked all they could see there, while the "unsteady" ones wandered all over the place picking here and there and wasting time. Of course Beth and Baby Carroll ran from bush to bush and sometimes spilled the few they gathered.

Miss Lark always said to us "stick to your bush," and that that was a good motto for life. Stay at one job till you have done it right, and don't run from one thing to another, doing nothing well. Especially she said this was true of lessons. If the lesson is hard, don't look over it once or twice and then throw the book down and say "I'll never be able to learn this," and take up some easier one. "Always," she said, "learn the hard lesson first and stick at it till you have conquered it."

In about half an hour Miss Lark told Lucy Crowe and me to light the fire and get on the kettle for tea. Lucy and I had done this before and knew how to start about it. We got two big stones and between them we put first paper and then the dry sticks we had gathered, and Tommy Crowe had brought a couple of peats that we broke in little pieces and put over the sticks. Miss Lark gave me a box of matches out of her basket and phew! up blazed the sticks and the peat caught fire and we soon had a grand flame. Miss Lark always chose this place for tea because there was a spring of water that bubbled up out of the ground, pure like crystal, and we caught it in cupfuls and filled the big kettle with it. It took the two of us to carry the kettle over to the fire and set it steady on the stones so that it wouldn't tip over. There was a strong wind coming on one side of the fire that threatened to blow it out, but I held an old waterproof that I had brought with me at that side of

the fire, while Lucy gathered sticks to add to the fire and make it boil the kettle.

At these picnics we always thought the kettle would never boil, and the gatherers were casting anxious glances over at the fire every now and then, but at last it began to "sing," and vapour came from the spout more and more and soon it bubbled in a frenzy and pushed up the lid as much as to say "where's the tea to put into me?" There was a great cheer when the news went round that the kettle was boiling and Miss Lark hurried over to infuse the tea. She had it in a little muslin bag and when she saw the water was boiling furiously she raised the lid and dropped it in and lifted the kettle right off.

The cloth was spread beside the kettle and the eatables arranged on it; we all sat round it with our cups in our hands, into which Lucy had poured the milk, and Miss Lark went round with the kettle and filled up each cup. We all helped ourselves to sugar which was passed round in a paper bag, the only one who didn't take any sugar being Miss Lark herself.

What a delicious smoky taste that tea had! No tea at home ever tasted half as nice. Bread and jam sandwiches disappeared quickly, followed by scones, some with currants and some with carraway seeds, and lovely "slim" cake—good Miss Lark had baked all these for us herself.

When we had nearly cleared the tablecloth and could eat no more and almost everybody had three cups of tea, Miss Lark said she would pack up what was left, and told us to go back to our work.

Instead of gathering blackberries the boys Tommy Crowe and Johnnie Dick spent most of their time playing

tricks on us. They discovered nettles growing among the brambles and took out their handkerchiefs that they might not sting themselves when they pulled them, and ran at us with them. Before we could find Miss Lark to stop their unfeeling conduct they had stung Nellie Brown and myself, I was stung on the arm, and Nellie on the leg. Miss Lark said she was exceedingly sorry to have to scold on such a happy occasion as this should be, but she was very angry with them and if they did not behave themselves properly she would never have them at her picnic again, and that for a boy to hurt a girl was cowardly, and that they should be ashamed of themselves. She made them hunt for dock leaves which cure the sting and that, strange to say, usually grow near the nettles. Nellie rubbed her leg and I my arm, and as we did so we repeated the old charm, "docken docken in, nettle nettle out." In a few minutes we felt the pain had nearly gone and only the redness remained, so we started to our work again.

"I don't care what Miss Lark says," said Tommy Crowe when her back was turned, "next year I'll be a big boy and not at her school at all; it's only for girls and babies."

"You would need to go some place," said Lucy, his sister, "where you would get a good spanking. Miss Lark is too soft with you. Boys all need a rod."

He put out his tongue at her and away he went, and after a while he and Johnnie came along looking "as innocent as a pet fox," and pretending he had something to show Lucy that he had found—he had a peculiar little stone in one hand that he held before her to look at, and with the other he dropped a worm down the back of her neck.

Lucy shrieked and shrieked and Miss Lark came rushing up.

"What's wrong? Is anyone hurt? It it you, Lucy?"

Everybody shouted: "Tommy put a worm down Lucy's back."

"It's crawling, Miss Lark, I feel it crawling, take it away," cried poor Lucy. "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Miss Lark took her behind a bush and undressed her while Lucy cried and screamed. Miss Lark found the worm and shook it away. Even then Lucy could not stop crying, "wait till I get home," she said, "and he'll get it, I'll tell Father on him."

Miss Lark looked everywhere for Tommy, but he and Johnnie could not be found, nor did we see them again till next day at school, where they were put to stand in the corner for half an hour, and kept-in both at lunch time and after school.

We were a happy, tired party coming home and no mistake! The air was getting frosty and the sun, like an enormous red ball, was sinking lower and lower. Miss Lark made even Lucy laugh by telling us that people who lived in the world long, long, long ago believed that the earth was square, with seas all round it, and that the sun dropped over the edge every night into the sea. They thought that Jupiter, a great god, made a new sun ever morning in the east and sent it on its way to travel over the earth to the west where it would fall over into the sea.

"We know now," she said, "that it is our own world that goes whirling round, sometimes one side of it near the sun and sometimes another."

"Does its head never get light?" asked Beth. For that was a favourite game we played. We took someone's hands and whirled them and ourselves round and round till we got so giddy we could not stand, and sometimes had to lie right down till we got our heads again.

Beth had quite a nice little basket of blackberries of which she was proud and was carrying it home with great care, when Fido suddenly thought he saw something that it was necessary for him to chase, and he dashed between Beth's legs, as that was the direct way. Poor Beth was knocked down, the basket flew out of her hand, and all her precious blackberries lay scattered on the dusty road.

She was in great distress at the accident, but trying very bravely to keep from crying, and we were sorry for her.

"There is no use," said Miss Lark, "in crying over spilt milk. All of you give Beth a handful out of your baskets," and she put in the first handful out of her own. Beth's basket became full again, the tears departed, and she was smiling and thanking us, but she took good care to keep out of Fido's way till we came to the Manse.

There we said good-bye to the others, and Miss Lark said, "I am sure you are all very tired, instead of learning lessons for to-morrow just go to bed, and I shall not expect you to learn any."

"Three cheers for Miss Lark," called Lucy Crowe. We stood round Miss Lark on the road and cheered and cheered. The people passing stopped to know what was the row about, and Mamma came out of the front door and Sally out of the back to see what was the matter.

We had a nice little boiling of blackberries. Mamma said she would show us how to make jelly out of them. Sally got out the preserving pan and we boiled the blackberries at once. Then she found the flannel jelly bag that was shaped like a funnel and hung it between two chairs in the pantry. We filled it up and let it drip into the basin below. So sleepy we were that Mamma sent us off to bed and said she would refill it.

Next afternoon when we came home from school we boiled the juice that had dripped through the night, and tried when it would "set" by pouring a little on a plate.

After tea we covered it and Beth printed two big B's on the top. Some of the jelly we gave to friends who were always kind to us. Beth said Mr. Moran must get a pot for he was the biggest dear of all.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HALLOWE'EN PARTY.

Soon after the blackberrying picnic came our Hallowe'en party. We had always a holiday next day, so had no lesson to learn that evening. Hallowe'en was the night of the greatest fun all the year round.

Mamma said we might invite any school friends we liked for tea and supper, and play our games in the kitchen, for Hallowe'en games are peculiar, and cannot be played in a parlour or drawing-room.

For tea Mamma had baked two big applecakes, for Hallowe'en is the time to eat apples in plenty, and also nuts, and when we had eaten any quantity of applecake and currant loaf we all trooped out to the kitchen, making as much clatter as we could, for Hallowe'en is a sort of carnival time, and you may do what you like.

Sally had prepared a big tub of water in the middle of the kitchen floor, with half a dozen apples bobbing up and down in it, and we took it in turns to go down on our knees to "duck" for them, that meant to catch an apple in your mouth as they floated about.

That sounds as if it was easy to do—it is just the opposite, I can tell you. It was nearly impossible to snatch one of these swimming apples. You opened your mouth as wide as you could in order to get your teeth stuck into it, and thought you had it, but no, it had escaped you and floated away to the other side of the tub. You would only get a mouthful of water that nearly choked you, and would have to raise your head and splutter for a while.

Once, when I was ducking, and did not see what he was going to do, Noble came behind me and pushed my head right into the water. When I got my breath I did not say much. I just watched my opportunity when he was ducking, and whispering to Lucy Crowe to help me, we held his head under the water till he was nearly drowned, although he was so strong and pushed against us. The water went all over his coat (the boys took off their collars to duck), and down the back of his neck, and there was the greatest laughing and cheering when he came dripping out of the tub, and ran to the roller behind the kitchen door to dry himself. Such terrible faces as he made as the cold water trinkled down his back!

For a long time we played at ducking, but very few of us could catch any apples, while all of us got pretty wet, but nothing like that matters on Hallowe'en.

Next we tried a different apple game that Noble had prepared beforehand. He made a sort of wheel with sticks crossed, and hung it from the kitchen ceiling by a long cord. On the end of one of the sticks he stuck an apple, and on one of the other sticks a short piece of tallow candle. This wheel was made to go round and round very fast, while turn about one of us opened our mouths and tried to catch the apple, but it went past so quick that as often as not we got a bite of the tallow candle instead. Oh! the horrible taste it had, we would have to run to the back door and spit out, while everyone roared with laughter. It was wild fun while it lasted, but we tired of it too, and wanted something else.

Noble said he knew a splendid game that required us all to leave the kitchen and go out into the hall, and come

in as we were called one by one. He stayed in the kitchen and kept Tommy Crowe with him to call us in.

He got Papa's soft round felt hat and made a deep well in the crown of it, and filled up this well with water. Then he got up on a stool and stood very straight and steady with the hat on his head, and told Tommy to call me in first. I looked at him, and he did look funny standing so high with Papa's hat on, but I could not see any trick in it. "Kneel down before me and keep looking up into my face," and I did.

"I am the King of Hallowe'en" he announced in a very loud, grand voice, something like Papa preaching, "and I am called 'Waterfillyhat the Terrible,' because I have the power of life and death, and those who disobey me or injure me an any way will immediately be drowned. You will require to answer these questions I am going to put to you truthfully, or it will be the worse for you," and he drew down his eyebrows and changed his usual smiling face into a cross, for-bidding one.

"When your good and kind and dear brother, who is celebrated for being the best boy in the world, was ducking for apples this very evening, did you and another wicked person conspire to hold his head under water?"

"Yes, O King," I said.

"You must be punished, and that at once, for performing such an act of cruelty," and he bowed his head, and all the cold water in his hat came in a rush down on my face and neck, nearly blinding me.

I got a shocking surprise, but I knew not to shout out for fear the others in the hall would hear me, and be afraid

to come in. I just dried myself at once, and thought how I would enjoy seeing them get a shower-bath too.

"Call in Miss Effie Drean," commanded the King to Tommy Crowe.

"Waterfillyhat the Terrible" went over much the same rigmarole as he had done to me, and warned her never to take her eyes off his face or it would be the worse for her.

"I am told," he said, "that you have a darling little donkey and that you beat it with a stick and force it to gallop over the hedges and ditches, and everything that comes in your way home from school, while you and your wicked companions sit comfortably in the cart behind laughing. Can that be so?" Answer me truthfully, or you will be drowned, and that at once."

"He's a lazy wee donkey," said Effie, "and he wouldn't go at all if I didn't give him a touch of the rod now and then. I never hurt him, I only tickle him."

"You must be punished for that," and he bowed his head, and the water poured over her.

I made a sign to her to be quiet, and dried her. One by one all the others came in, and Noble made a capital judge, and proved them all guilty of something. They all got a damp surprise, but they were so anxious to see the next person getting it that they said nothing, but dried themselves and laughed.

Beth and Baby Carroll were brought in together last. I would only let him put a little water in the hat, and they knelt as they were told and looked up at Noble standing so high above everybody else.

"I am the King of the Fairies," he said to them, "all the beautiful yellow ragweeds in the fields belong to me, and at

night I turn them into white horses for my fairies to ride on in the moonlight. I want to ask you, did you ever pull any of my ragweeds?"

Maybe I did," said Beth, "but I can't remember." Baby Carroll said she never did.

"I am quite sure you both did, and you must be punished for stealing my fairy flowers." But just as Noble bowed I pulled them both back, and the water went on the floor, and they hardly got a drop at all.

Mamma—and we did wonder how Mamma could sit in the parlour darning stockings and such extraordinary fun going on in the kitchen, while Papa too had gone away (I'm afraid on purpose) for the evening—Mamma now came out and said we had had enough of wet games, and to come into the drawing-room and play some dry ones.

We played the ring on the string. Mamma tied several bits of string together to make it long enough, and made it into a circle, put a small curtain ring on it and we all sat round in a circle to, with one out in the middle. All kept their hands over the string while the one who was "out" would try to find whose hand was over the ring as we passed it from one to the other, and tried to "bamboozle" her. She would think she had hit on the person who had it, and when she seized their hands and opened them it had been perhaps passed on. Whoever it was caught with was "out."

It was a nice quite game, and cooled us down after the rowdy watery games of the kitchen.

At nine o'clock we had supper. On the table was an immense apple dumpling with white sauce for it. "There is a ring in it," said Mamma, "and I warn you for I don't want any of you to swallow it." We kept turning the

pudding well over in our mouths, and everybody pretended they had got the ring, but nobody could show it yet. We began to think the ring had not been served, and was still in the bit of pudding that remained on the dish, when Hugh held it up in triumph above his head and cheered.

"You're going to be married, Hugh," we all shouted.

"I am not," said Hugh. "I'm never going to be married. I don't like girls."

Said Mamma: "Whoever gets the ring is to be a good boy or girl for three hundred and sixty-five days, till Hallowe'en comes round again."

What a terribly long time to look forward to, we thought! and wished it might come next week, that we might go over all the fun we had had to-night once more.

Fathers and mothers were coming now to take home our guests. They didn't want to go and hid, but at last all the coats and hats were on—and they were told to thank Mamma for the lovely evening we had. "Thank you for the nice evening, Mrs. Whiteside," they said, and Mamma said she was glad they had enjoyed it.

After they had all gone, and the door closed, Beth said her head was sore. Mamma had noticed that she had not eaten any tea or supper, and she took her hand, which felt very hot, to lead her up to bed at once. We watched her go up the stairs, and when she got to the turn she looked down at us. Her sweet lovely face was flushed, and her eyes were very bright as she shouted down: Good night Noble, good night Ida, good night Hugh." And that was the last we saw of our darling little Beth for six long, never-to-be-forgotten weeks.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BETH'S ILLNESS.

I slept very soundly that night, and dreamt I was ducking for apples, and that Noble threw the whole tub of water over me, and that Hugh swallowed the ring in the dumpling, and he had to get his throat cut to take it out, and a lot of nonsensical things. I suppose I had eaten too many apples and nuts, and too much apple dumpling before going to bed.

The first thing I knew in the morning was, opening my eyes and seeing Mamma standing beside my bed. and although I was only half awake I thought by her face that there was something wrong. And so it proved. Beth had been ill and feverish all night, and Papa had gone for the Doctor.

I jumped up in bed and wanted to rush in to see her, but Mamma would not let me, and said none of us would be allowed to see her till after the Doctor had been here.

It was late I knew, but I felt sad and out of sorts, and dressed slowly, and when I went downstairs the empty table from which the breakfast things had not been removed, looked lonely and deserted. I went into the kitchen and Sally handed me my plate of porridge to carry into the parlour, without speaking, but I said I couldn't eat it, and she said I wouldn't get anything else till I would eat it. Dear! but Sally was snappish and cross that morning! I knew it was because something ailed Beth, for Sally loved her best of all, but indeed everybody did, for Beth loved everybody, and always wanted to help them. I never remember Beth to be disobedient, and if she did anything wrong or broke by accident something in the house, she

had never to be scolded like the rest of us, but comforted, for she would cry and cry and ask to be forgiven. I went back into the parlour without my porridge, and ate some bread and butter, but I did not feel hungry for that either.

I went out into the garden to see if I could find the boys, for the house seemed so dreary. Hugh was wandering about, and Noble was weeding one of the walks. Both were very dull and quiet. There was a rattle of wheels on the road, and we all looked towards the gate. Yes, it was the Doctor, and he had brought Papa back with him. The Doctor shouted for Noble to come and hold his horse, and Noble jumped up from his knees and ran. This was a job he loved. Anything to do with a horse for him!

The Doctor and Papa went into the house. Noble stood stroking the horse's nose. The horse was very restless, and Noble kept saying: "there now, beauty, be quiet, be quiet," but the horse did not want to stand still. The next thing I saw was Noble right up in the gig, and with the reins gathered up in his hand. "Come on, Hugh," he shouted, "and we'll give the horse a bit of exercise, for he won't stand, come Ida, get you up behind." I tried to hold Hugh back, but he had already his foot on the step, and had sprung up beside Noble.

"Good bye, Ida, if you won't come," said Noble, and gave the reins a jerk, and said "tch, tch, tch," and away went horse and gig and boys up the hill and out of sight.

In about twenty minutes the Doctor came out. There was no sign of his horse and gig, and he was not only angry, he was anxious, and so was Papa. "That's a wild young animal," he said, "it takes me all my time to control him, I hope they'll be all right."

I was standing by listening, and was terrified. The

Doctor and Papa kept looking up and down the road for any sign of the gig, when a man came down the hill nearly running. It was Felix Tumulty.

"Are yez lookin' for the horse an' gig, for it's up above at the cross roads. Philip M'Nulty ketched the horse when it was runnin' away with the gig empty."

"But where are the lads?" said the doctor, and I saw that he and Papa were greatly frightened.

"They were throwed out at the foot of Dilly's Hill just on the saft grass at the roadside, they're not much the worse—cut a wee bit about the face—that's all. Here they're all comin' now."

Down the hill came the horse and gig with Philip driving carefully, and our two rash boys in it. Such sights as they were. I could not look at them. Noble's face was covered with blood, and one of Hugh's legs seemed to be badly brused and cut.

"Now," said the Doctor, "I don't think they're much the worse, and we won't disturb Mrs. Whiteside. We'll just take them into the kitchen and fix them up, and there'll be no harm done."

When Sally saw them she screamed, and let the saucepans she had in her hand fall, and it clattered on the floor.

"Get me a basin of hot water and a sponge, my good woman, said the doctor, "as quick as you can," and Sally ran to do his bidding with her hands shaking. The Doctor had his bag with him, and soon our two young playboys were attended to. They looked as if they had just come from the wars, for Hugh's leg was bandaged, and Noble had sticking plaster on his forehead and chin.

When the Doctor had finished with them he began to

scold, but Papa said nothing; he was too thankful, I saw, that nothing serious was the matter.

"Well," said the Doctor, when the scolding was over, and he was getting his own good humoured self again, "boys will be boys, I suppose, till the end of the chapter, and maybe I would have done it myself at your age. That rascal of yours," he said to Papa, pointing to Noble, "will maybe do something worth while in the world yet, he's not the worst sort. Give me a boy that can't resist a horse."

After the doctor had gone Papa went upstairs to tell Mamma about it, and that the pair were little the worse for their escapade. Mamma came running down and hugged them, and said she was so thankful they weren't killed that she wouldn't scold them, and she brushed the tears from her eyes. Sally was openly crying into her apron.

"There is more bad news for us," said Mamma, "The Doctor says Beth has scarlatina, and that you three must be sent away as soon as possible. Papa is just going to telegraph to Aunt Bethiah to say he is bringing you to Belfast this afternoon to stay with her till Beth is better."

Our first thoughts were "That will be dreadful," but on second thoughts it mightn't be so bad, we would get to Belfast, and none of us were ever there, and our last thoughts, at least mine, were sorrowful at leaving Beth so ill. If only we had had Beth with us I would have been happy enough, and not even to see her before I went made me miserable.

Mamma and Sally had a hurry to get our clothes packed.

The dinner was pushed forward, and the three of us stood in the lobby shouting good-bye to Beth. A faint, small voice, that seemed to come from some far away distance came through the closed door: "Good-bye Ida, good-bye Noble, good-bye Hugh."

CHAPTER XXIV.

BELFAST.

Old Peggy Mallon—we thought her old, but she could still work for her living and often did odd jobs for the Manse—wheeled our luggage to the station in the Manse wheel-barrow, and also a box of eggs carefully papered by Papa himself in a hurry, and a pair of fowl. Mamma had sent me first thing up to Biddy's to tell her we wanted a pair to be down at the Manse plucked and all in two hours. I informed Biddy of this and that Beth had scarlatina and that Noble and Hugh and I were going to Belfast to stay with Aunt Bethiah—all in one breath.

"Dear save us, that's the quare pity about wee Miss Beth," exclaimed Biddy, quite upset at the news, "God sen' her soon well again, the wee jewel, an' yous three havin' to go to Belfast an' to be undher her oul' ladyship too. How long will yez be?"

"Six weeks."

"Six weeks! Boys-a-dear! I'd liefer you would do that nor me, for she's that ill to plaze an' choke full o' notions. Dear! but she takes life hard an' her with plenty. It's a pity she annoys herself so much about nothin', for what does them trifles matther when we be lyin' in our graves. I'll be as comfortable in it as her that couldn't rest for cleanin' an' improvin' an doin' this this way an' that that way, shure anyway does just as well and betther, for it doesn't wear you nor nobody else out. Tell her ladyship the hole in the roof's mended an' not a dhrop comes in now, surely that'll plaze her."

Paddy came in from his usual occupation of contending with the goat, and was told of the situation. "Well, to be sure now," he was starting in his leisurely way to comment on it when Biddy interrupted him.

"Away out with you an' ketch a couple of thon early flock of chickens; they're a brave size now, an' ketch them as quick as you can, for they're to go to Belfast with the childher," ordered Biddy, "an' mind yourself that you pick the two fattest for they're for her ladyship."

"Are yez takin' them dead or alive?" enquired Paddy.

"Dead to be sure, you oul' gomeril," said Biddy. "They would look well walking down Belfast street with two hens cackling in their basket beside them. An' pluck them while they're warm, for I haven't the time."

"Nayther have I, but it wouldn't be her oul' ladyship but she'd keep you busy."

"You haven't to get the dinner—what I have—mebbe you'd like to go without that!" Biddy spoke as if she intended to present Paddy with a banquet of several courses. Her bill of fare never varied the whole year round. It was potatoes and salt, with occasionally a mug of buttermilk as a treat added.

I left them arguing as to who would pluck the chickens. I don't know whose hard lot it fell to but they arrived in good time.

It was harder than I thought to say good-bye to Mamma and Sally. "May God watch over you in them foreign places,"—for Sally believed that once you got beyond the surroundings of Innis you could not count on being quite safe—"me head's dinnlin' with all the trouble, an' now I'll have nothin' to do to keep me from thinkin' long when yous

are all banished away. Och, Oh! me childher! me childher!" and Sally broke down.

We were quieter on that journey than usual. The boys stood looking out of the window, and I sat beside Papa and felt safe going through the tunnel.

When we came out of the train and on to the street and saw the tramcars and the traffic we got rather excited. Such a lot of people walking about and how strange that we did not know them! It was so different from our roads where we knew everybody and everybody knew us, and would not think of passing without bidding us "the time of day." The men would touch their hats to Papa and say "it's a fine day, your Reverence, God be thanked," or if it was raining, "it's a saft day, your Reverence, but it'll do good," and the old women would curtsey.

We were soon at Aunt Bethiah's. I did not like the look of it. A gloomy red brick house in a row with others so alike that only for the numbers on the doors you would not know one from another. No flowers, no grass, no trees to be seen. Why and how did people exist without these! We knew she lived at 10, Pleasant Terrace, for we were accustomed to seeing that address on letters and papers that Papa posted to her regularly. When Noble saw 10, Pleasant Terrace, he said it should be 10 Unpleasant Terrace. And the door never opened till we had knocked—these town ways *were* queer. When we expected visitors at the Manse everybody went to the station to meet them except Mamma who was preparing for them at home, and she would be outside the gate watching, and go down the road to meet them when she saw them coming.

A servant nearly as old as Aunt Bethiah opened the

door. She never as much as smiled at us. Indeed she looked as if she disapproved of us. If Sally was sorry to lose us she didn't rejoice to find us.

Our visitors always shook hands with Sally, and Sally would say, "you're welcome, sir, or you're welcome, ma'am, and I hope you're in good health," and when they would enquire about Sally's health she would say, "I never was betther, thank God."

Aunt Bethiah came into the hall when she heard us. She seemed astonished, and no wonder, at the sticking plaster and bandaged leg, but she kissed us everyone. Papa did not seem to mind it, but the boys turned their heads to avoid it. Noble just hated anyone to kiss him.

Inside the house looked as dismal as without. The blinds were half way down and I stumbled going up the dark stairs. My bedroom was to the front and the boys' to the back, looking out on a dreary strip of yard—our pig at home had a better view from his stye. The only thing that seemed home-like was Aunt Bethiah's tortoise-shell cat sitting on the high yard wall; here there was no "Towzer" to take away the stiffness by trying to knock you down and say he anyway would give you an "Irish welcome." Afterwards we found that "Tabby" didn't approve of us either; when we made friendly advances to her she gave us a haughty stare and would march off and curl herself up on her cushion and go to sleep. She never rubbed herself against our legs like dear Dandydozer that I would have loved to bring with me. I would have been afraid to take "Tabby" to bed for fear she would bite me under the clothes. Aunt Bethiah and Rebekah and Tabby seemed to us "all of a piece."

After dinner Papa left and we felt desolate indeed. Aunt Bethiah seemed to guess something of what we were suffering, for she put on her bonnet and dolman and took us out for a walk.

The first thing that revived our spirits or made us think that there was any fun at all in Belfast was watching an amusing performance that we fortunately happened to see.

Passing a side street we saw a man beating a little drum and saw children gathering round something that looked a little to us like a pulpit, and we wondered what it meant.

Aunt Bethiah said it was a "Punch and Judy show." We forgot our unhappiness as we watched it. Punch had a great hooked nose and carried a stick that he used on everyone. He killed his wife Judy, and he killed the baby, and at the very end, when the policeman came to hang him for all his wicked acts, he hanged the policeman. He was a match for them all! There was a quaint little live dog called Toby with a frill round its neck that also took part in the play. Hugh thought Punch and Judy were living beings, but Noble and I knew right well that they were not. Aunt Bethiah said it was a very old show, and was introduced into this country from Italy in the reign of Queen Anne. She said Punch and Judy were dolls and were worked and made to move by a man who was low down inside the box. Oh! how I wished Beth could have seen it. And I thought I will describe it all to her when we go home.

The days dragged by at 10 Pleasant Terrace, and every night when I was going to bed I marked off that day in a little calendar I had in my Bible, and counted the number of the days I had still before me—one less every day.

Many a night I cried myself to sleep and in the dark I would begin to think that maybe Beth would die. This was such an awful thought that I would get up out of bed and kneel down and pray to God to make Beth better, although I never missed a night or morning of praying that. I always felt better after doing this and would get back into bed and lie listening to the tic-tac, tic-tac, of the tall old grandfather clock in the lobby, and comfort myself by thinking that every tic-tac was bringing me nearer home and Beth.

Noble and Hugh had each other at nights. I suppose they slept sound, I never knew, but I could see that in daylight they were often wretched and reminded me of the poor animals in their cages at the Zoo in Dublin that I had pitied so much. 10 Pleasant Terrace was a sort of prison to them. But indeed I must say it, and do Aunt Bethiah justice, that if she was, as Noble said, "pernickety," she was at heart kind and good, and tried in her own way to make us as happy as possible. She fished out an old draught-board for Noble and Hugh. She also gave Noble his first lessons in chess. In after years this game was one of his few pleasures, and he played it well.

She allowed us to go to the Botanic Gardens, which were near. I liked best to watch the swans. Noble said that if you called "Blackfoot" at them they would get into a temper and fly at you, for they were very "touchy" about the colour of their feet. They were all so beautifully white, and swam about so proudly and so vain of their graceful necks, that they did not like to be reminded that their feet were black. Hugh used to shout "Blackfoot" at them, and then run away as fast as he could and hide.

Miss Spark allowed Janet to come and spend every

Saturday with us. "Proud Janet" could go about any place, and she would take us for long drives on the tops of the tramcars, where we could see about us, and even down to the docks to see the steamers that went across to England and Scotland every night. Noble at this time thought there was no life like a sailor's, but Hugh said that when he grew up he would drive a tramcar. Hugh changed his mind after one Saturday that we were down town with Janet, and all at once there came a great rushing noise and a whistling, and people ran out of the shops to see something that would be past if they did not hurry. It was the fire brigade dashing up the street, the horses galloping, and the men with brass helmets on their heads standing on the machine ready to jump off the minute they came to the fire. Some men and boys ran after it, and Janet had to hold Noble and Hugh one by each arm, or I think they would have run too. After that Hugh said he would be a fireman.

The days were getting in nicely. I had more days marked off than unmarked, and I no longer cried myself to sleep, for the news from home was good, and Beth, who had been very ill, was going on all right now.

Then one day something exciting did happen. Hugh got lost. Aunt Bethiah had told him not to leave his own street if he were out alone, but Hugh was never very good at doing what he was told, and he wandered into another street and yet another, and so on, turning corners that he thought would bring him back into his own street again, and in reality getting farther and farther away.

The bell rang for dinner but no Hugh answered it. Aunt Bethiah thought he was washing his hands, which we were required to do before every meal. She said "grace"

and began to carve; still no Hugh appeared, and she sent Noble to see what was keeping him. He came back and said he had looked upstairs and downstairs, and even on the street, and could find him nowhere.

Aunt Bethiah became alarmed, but we went on with dinner, expecting the door to open every minute, and Hugh walk in.

Just as we were finishing there came a very loud knock at the hall door. Aunt Bethiah rose quickly and went to see who it was, and we ran too. On the step was a big, enormous policeman, and with him our Hugh, who looked like a midget beside him. I could see Hugh had been crying.

We rushed into the hall and Noble, forgetful of Aunt Bethiah's rules, reached the door first and opened it.

"Does this wee fella belong to you, ma'am?" said the big policeman. He might have known that without asking, for Hugh ran past him into the house, overjoyed at seeing anyone he knew again.

Aunt Bethiah, as punishment, would not allow him out that evening again, but Noble and I thought he had been punished enough, he had got such a fright running here and there in strange streets, and feeling entirely lost. He was too shy to speak to any of the strange people he met, and then a kind policeman noticed him crying, and looking as if he did not know what way to turn, and asked him what was the matter. He asked him his name and where he lived, and Hugh was able to tell him he was staying at 10 Pleasant Terrace.

"That's all right sonny," said the policeman, "you'll be there in ten minutes," and he brought him straight to Aunt Bethiah's door.

The home news got better and better, and not many days before Christmas a letter in Mamma's writing lay on my plate. Aunt Bethiah allowed no letters to be opened till we had finished breakfast. I did not eat much breakfast that morning, for I guessed what was inside it, and here it is:—

"Darling Ida,

You will be glad to hear that Beth is well again, and the danger from infection over. We expect you all to return on Friday with Janet, who is getting her Christmas holidays then. At one time Beth was very ill indeed, but we, and I'm sure you, prayed to God to spare her dear life to us, and He heard and answered our prayers. Janet will write and arrange with you what time you will meet her at the station, and I'm sure Aunt Bethiah will see you safely there. With love to Aunt Bethiah, and hoping you have not given her too much trouble.

I am,

Your loving Mother."

I was prepared to dance as usual, but Aunt Bethiah's eye was on me, and recalled me to my duty of showing her the letter.

"We are going home on Friday, Noble; we are going home on Friday, Hugh," I said. They were for jumping up too, and I suppose dancing a war dance, but Aunt Bethiah looked over her spectacles and told them to finish their breakfast quietly.

"Going home on Friday!" I said it over to myself, and I sang it over to myself. "We are going home on Friday, and this is Wednesday. Only two nights more!"

Friday came, although we thought it never would, for

we were counting every hour, and the tic-tacs of the old clock in the lobby were like music to me.

At last our luggage sat in the hall, and we were waiting for the jaunting car to come. In my arms was a precious package. It was a doll for Beth that opened and shut her eyes and said "Mamma." Aunt Bethiah had helped me to buy it—indeed she paid for it—and had searched and found a lovely bit of sky blue silk to dress her in, and had cut it out and helped me to sew it.

We lost no time in climbing up on the car while the driver was putting our bags in the "well." This old horse did not require to be held, he was only too glad to get standing still for a while.

Aunt Bethiah sat on one side with her arm round Hugh for fear he would fall off, and he kept trying to shake it off, for he thought he knew all right how to sit on a jaunting car. Noble and I were on the other side.

"Such a slow old horse," said Noble to the driver. "If you don't watch he'll fall asleep altogether."

"The craythers doin' his best," said the man, "but he's like his master, not so young as he used to be."

Janet was standing outside the station watching for us. We jumped off so quickly that Hugh landed on his hands and knees. Aunt Bethiah looked up and down the train, and put us in a carriage with an old gentleman. Poor old gentleman! He had to put his paper down, for he couldn't read any more. The train whistled and shrieked, the wheels began to move, and after the last sight of Aunt Bethiah on the platform, we jumped up and down and made a frightful racket. Noble and Hugh would lean out of the window no matter what Janet would say. The old gentleman tried the

doors to be sure they were securely fastened, and told them how dangerous it was to lean out so far, and they paid more attention to him than Janet.

We dashed past some of the stations without stopping, and thought that splendid and obliging of the train to do so for us, and bye and bye I knew we were nearing the tunnel. The old gentleman got up and closed both windows, and Janet put an arm round Hugh, but he pushed it away, and said he wasn't a baby. I put my fingers in my ears to keep out the fearful din. Then a greyness came in the blackness, and our gallant train dashed out into the beautiful broad daylight again.

Hurrah! Here we were at Innis at last, and Papa on the platform shouting at us to wait till the train stopped, while Andy Dolan, the porter, walked along and held the handle of the door to prevent us tumbling out on our heads.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

Janet took Papa by one arm and I took him by the other, and the boys ran on to see if Peggy was there with the wheelbarrow. She was only able to take our luggage, and would have to come back for Janet's trunk. Away the boys ran in front, and never stopped, I think, till they came to the Manse, but I was taking in the old familiar landmarks as a thirsty person in the desert welcomes a drink of cold water. The people along the way came out of their houses and shook hands with us, and said they "had missed us quarely," and that we were "all well improved." They always said that when you came back from any place. It was the proper thing to say.

The old Manse! How often had I pictured it to myself in my dreams both of night and day, and longed for its shelter. I would have given all Belfast at that moment had I owned it for that old-fashioned, white-washed home, with its low roof tree and windows holding many little panes. The yellow jasmine had now covered the house with gold, and we were sure we could find somewhere on its walls if we looked a "monthly rose." Some of our beloved trees were bare, but the firs were evergreen. I remember as a smaller child putting my arms round the trees and telling them I loved them. I wondered if they too had been lonely without the merry childish voices that made the garden ring, and the patter of swift feet running around them. At any rate we had missed these dear companions, and rejoiced to see them again.

There was Mamma at the gate coming quickly to meet

us, and Sally following behind, her face shining like the moon, thinking no doubt that "the Misthress" should have the first kiss, but Towzer beat them both, and made more fuss over us than anybody. And the dear, dear face of Beth at the window, with Dandydozer in her arms, waving her hand to us! Scarcely could we get fast enough to her, and now she was in our arms. We held her off and looked at her, she was taller, and her dark curls were cropped close and clustered round her head. But she was the same "Angel Beth" given back to us to love more than ever, and to love us.

At tea every one talked at once, Sally could not stay out of the room, but kept buttering scones for us, and taking our cups to Mamma to be refilled.

I shall never forget Papa's prayer that night. It was one of thanksgiving to God for all His mercies. It is fifty years since I listened to it, but I can re-echo its gratitude to our Heavenly Father, and say from my heart: "Surely Goodness and Mercy have followed me all the days of my Life."

We watched Beth go up the stairs with her precious new doll in her arms, and her happy voice called down to us: "Good-night Janet, good-night Noble, good-night Ida, good-night Hugh."

EPILOGUE.

Like the trees of the old Manse which shed their leaves till only one remained, I, Ida, am that last leaf. Beth was the first to fade. Long, lonesome years have passed since she said her last "good-night" to us, but when I meet her soon it will be "good-morning."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

"The Bush That Burned"

First Illustrated Edition, 5/-.

"Tyrone Among the Bushes"

Second Edition, 2/6.

"Not since Ian Maclaren's sketches of rural life in Presbyterian Scotland appeared in the 'British Weekly,' have I had such real enjoyment as in reading these two books by Miss Foster."—Dr. J. C. Johnston.

Extracts from literary talk on "The Bush that Burned," broadcast from Athlone by Aodh de Blacam.

"Except for *My Lady of the Chimney Corner* no comparable picture of Presbyterian Ulster has, in my judgment, been done . . . . An Ulster *Vicar of Wakefield* . . . .

"Miss Foster describes every stage of a minister's life, often with a quiet irony, but never with that unkind satire that is the fashion among cheaper novelists, in their pictures of an older, graver, less sophisticated generation . . . .

"I have stressed the humorous side of this good book because I have spent an hour or two reading it aloud and laughing loud; but I commend it on serious grounds too, and especially as an example of the rich but wholesome Irish life of the North, drawn so tenderly and well—a book that ought to be in every Irish home from Portrush to Cape Clear."

"It is a pleasure to find this brilliant portrayal of Presbyterian life in mid-Ulster now in its second edition . . . . true to life and as sound to the core as a Tyrone apple." *Irish Independent.*

"I have laughed over this book more than any other book for many a long day." *Irish Times.*